

# MIKE SHAYNE

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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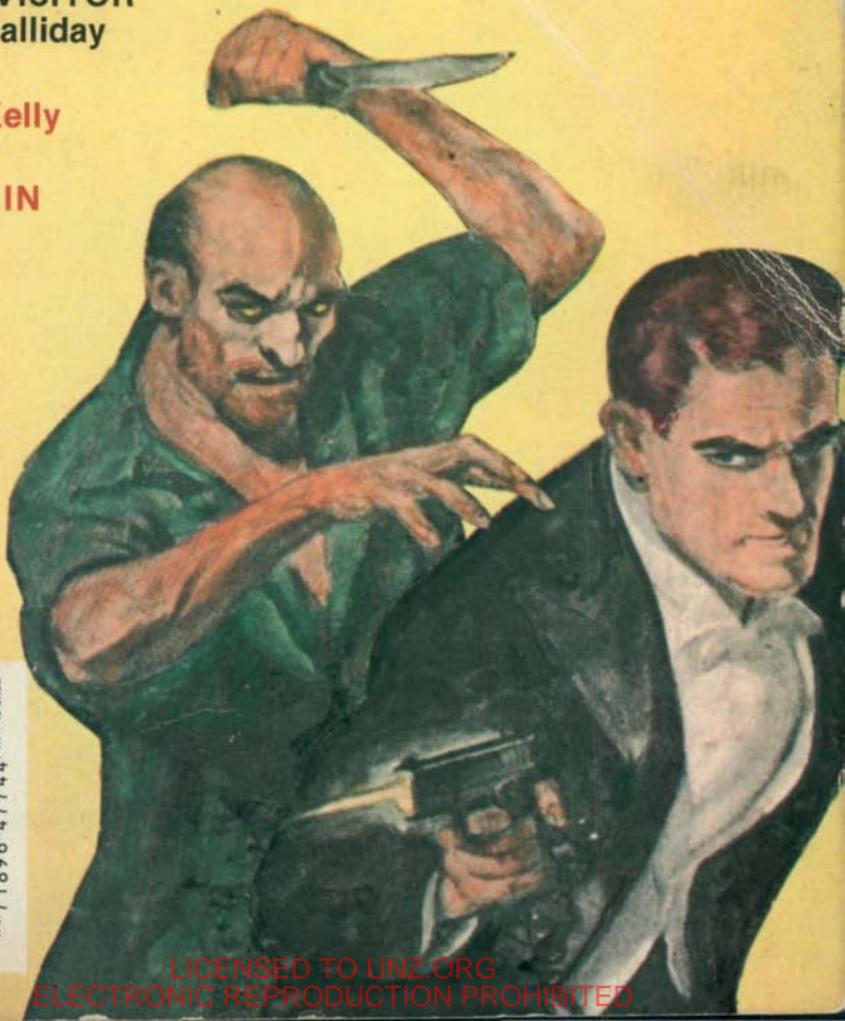


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# MIKE SHAYNE

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### DEADLY VISITOR

by Brett Halliday

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*Everyone knew that private detective Mike Shayne and Police Chief Peter Painter didn't get along. But this was carrying a grudge a bit too far!*

# Deadly Visitor

by BRETT HALLIDAY

THE SECRETARY IN MIAMI BEACH POLICE CHIEF PETER Painter's office looked up and arched an eyebrow in surprise. A tall, brawny, redhead man was striding into the chief's outer office, a smile on his lean face.

Michael Shayne stopped in front of her desk and said pleasantly, "Morning. Is Chief Painter in?"

The secretary had recognized Shayne as soon as he stepped into the office. Nearly everyone on the Miami Beach force was familiar with the big private investigator from across the bay in Miami. And they knew, too, of the long-standing feud between Shayne and their chief. For Shayne to show up here at headquarters and ask to see Painter meant that trouble would probably not be long in coming.

Nodding her head, the secretary reached for the phone on her desk as she asked Shayne, "Do you have an appointment?" She knew good and well that he didn't, but she wanted to hear what he had to say to the question.

Shayne grinned wider. "This is just a friendly visit. I didn't figure I'd need an appointment to run in and say hello."

*A friendly visit?* The secretary's frown deepened. In all the years that Shayne had been in the area, the relationship between him and Painter could never have been called friendly. There had been some grudging respect between the men at times, but that was all.

"I'll see if he has a free moment," the secretary said. She knew that Painter would want to hear about this strange behavior from Shayne, whether he wanted to see him or not.

She punched the button that connected her with the phone on Painter's desk. When he answered, she said, "I'm sorry to disturb you, Chief, but you've got a visitor out here."

"I don't have any appointments scheduled for right now, do I?" Painter asked.

"No, sir. He doesn't have an appointment. It's Mike Shayne."

She was prepared for the sudden disgusted snort that came over the wire. "Shayne?" Painter exclaimed. "What the hell does *he* want?"

The secretary hesitated just for a second before replying, "He says he's here for a friendly visit, sir."

Shayne was watching her as she spoke to Painter, the big grin still on his face. He appeared genuinely happy to be there.

There was a moment of surprised silence from Painter, and then he told his secretary, "That damn shamus has to be up to something. Better send him on in."

"Yes, sir." The secretary hung up and raised her eyes to Shayne again. She told him, "The chief says you can go right in."

"Thanks," Shayne nodded. He walked past her desk and grasped the knob of the heavy wooden door leading to the inner office. He turned it and stepped inside.

PAINTER WAS STANDING BEHIND HIS DESK, LEANING FORWARD slightly with his small hands resting on top of the desk. He was short and dapper, with a thin black moustache, and his face showed the obvious dislike he felt for Shayne as the big detective closed the door behind him. Shayne continued to smile and said, "Hello, Painter. How are you?"

Painter's mouth twitched. "Cut the pleasantries, Shayne. What do you want."

Shayne's broad shoulders lifted in a shrug. "I just thought I'd stop by and say hello. Anything wrong with that?"

Painter regarded him warily. He said, "You don't expect me to buy that, do you, Shayne? The only reason you'd come to see me is if you were trying to pull something shady. What is it this time, one of your clients in trouble over here? What are you fishing for?"

"I'm not fishing for anything," Shayne said. "I'm just sorry you don't want this to be a friendly visit, Painter."

His hand slipped inside his coat. Painter started to frown, but before the expression had time to finish forming, Shayne had jerked his pistol

from its shoulder holster and was bringing it to bear on Painter.

"What the hell — " the chief started to exclaim.

Shayne pulled the trigger.

Painter had seen the tightening pressure on the trigger and forgotten about trying to figure out what was going on here. His instincts told him he would be dead if he didn't stop thinking and act, instead.

He dove for cover.

The gun in Shayne's hand blasted, sending a bullet slamming through the space where Painter had been a second earlier. Painter was grabbing for his own gun as he threw himself behind his heavy desk. His heart fell as his fingers found nothing. He wasn't wearing a weapon; in fact, he remembered now that it was still locked up in his desk in its usual place. Shayne's gun exploded again, and another bullet thudded into the wall behind the desk.

"Help!" Painter shouted, trying to burrow his way deeper into the carpet on the floor. "Goddamn it, help!"

There was still a tiny smile on Shayne's face as he squeezed the trigger twice more, lowering the gun a little bit each time. The bullets were coming closer to Painter now, but they were still hitting only the wall. Shayne didn't appear to even notice as the door behind him slammed open.

The shots and Painter's cries had brought plenty of assistance. Two uniformed cops and several more plainclothes officers burst into the room as Shayne fired his fifth shot. This one hit the desk, scarring its polished finish.

"Get him!" Painter screamed.

One of the uniformed cops grabbed for his pistol, but a plainclothes man shouldered past him and dove at Shayne, crashing into his back and driving him forward. The other cops joined in the fight. The gun was jerked roughly from Shayne's hand and the weight of the men riding his back now sent all of them sprawling on the floor. Strangely, Shayne stayed almost limp, offering no resistance now that he had been disarmed and the threat to Painter was over.

**THE DIMINUTIVE CHIEF STAYED WHERE HE WAS BEHIND THE**  
desk until his men had hauled Shayne upright and pulled his arms behind him, slapping a pair of handcuffs on his wrists. One of the detectives caught his breath and said, "It's okay, Chief; we've got him cuffed now."

Painter rose from the floor, trying to look as if nothing had happened to rumple his three hundred dollar suit and his dignity. The officers were surrounding Shayne, but he was standing on his own. His face

was blank now, completely devoid of expression as he stared straight ahead.

Painter pointed a finger at him and howled, "Dammit, you've done it now! You can't just walk in here like that and start blasting away at me. You're going to jail this time, Shayne, I promise you that!"

Shayne stood, silent, unmoving.

One of the officers looked at him quizzically and said, "I think there's something wrong with him, Chief."

"Damn right there's something wrong with him! He finally went crazy. Get him out of here and book him for attempted murder." A malicious smile stretched Painter's mouth. "You've bought it, Shayne. I'm going to see to it that you never see the light of day again!"

Two of the policemen reached for Shayne, to turn him around and march him out of the office, but before they could even touch him, he began to sway. His eyes rolled up in his head, his shoulders slumped, and with no more warning than that, he fell.

They were too surprised to catch him. Shayne fell heavily to the floor and lay there limply, his eyes closed now. They all gaped at him, even Painter, for a long moment, then one of the detectives knelt beside him and said excitedly, "Chief, I don't know if he's breathing!"

## II

IT WAS LIKE STARTING AT THE BOTTOM OF A POOL OF THICK black mud and trying to swim to the top. The effort seemed never-ending to Shayne. He kept trying to pull himself up to where he could at least see some light, but the blackness surrounding him was tugging on him, holding him down.

The voices were the first things he was really aware of, several of them talking angrily around him. They gave him something to aim at. Shayne put all of his strength into one more stab at consciousness.

He opened his eyes.

No one noticed he was awake at first. There were a few seconds when Shayne could look around and try to get some idea of what was going on. He was lying on his back in a bed, he knew that, and from the starched crispness of the sheets and the pale neutral color of the room's walls and ceiling, he would have been willing to bet that he was in a hospital.

Two men were standing by the bed, one on each side of it. To Shayne's left was Peter Painter, his face distorted by anger. On the other side was an older man, with a broad, red face, a beefy build, and an unlit cigar clenched between his teeth. Shayne knew him right away, as he had Painter. The second man was Will Gentry, the chief of

the Miami Police force, and one of Shayne's oldest friends.

"I tell you, it's all a fake!" Painter was declaring, waving his hands for emphasis. "The only thing wrong with Shayne is that he's gone around the bend. My God, he tried to kill me, and I'm going to make sure he pays for it!"

Gentry shifted the cigar in his mouth and growled, "Take it easy, Painter. You know as well as I do that the doctor said Mike isn't faking. He really did pass out in your office."

"Then why hasn't he come to?" Painter demanded. "He wasn't hurt during the scuffle; my men are sure of that."

A new voice answered Painter's question. "We're not sure why Mr. Shayne hasn't regained consciousness, Chief Painter. We're not even sure why he collapsed in the first place."

Shayne was vaguely aware that there were several other people in the room besides the two police chiefs, but he couldn't make out who they were. His eyes were mere slits, open just enough for him to see the area around his bed. The lighting in the room was subdued, too, making the rest of the place pretty shadowy.

He didn't need to see the next speaker to know who she was, though. A familiar voice said, "Besides, Chief, you know Mike Shayne wouldn't do what he did unless something was wrong with him. He's no murderer."

Shayne wanted to smile, but his facial muscles didn't seem to want to work yet. Terry Denton was a redhead, too, but she was a beautiful young woman in addition to being a member of Painter's homicide squad. She and Shayne had worked together on several cases in the past, and she was probably his best friend on the Miami Beach force; she was certainly one of the few who worked for Painter who would ever stand up for Shayne.

Painter was cursing under his breath. He muttered, "The goddamn shamus *did* try to kill me. Shot at me five times!"

Shayne's mind was beginning to click over in its normal fashion now. He was starting to grasp what they were saying about him, and none of it made any sense.

They were saying he had tried to shoot Painter, right in the chief's own office. That was crazy. He didn't like Painter and never had, but he sure as blazes wouldn't try to shoot him . . .

THERE WAS A DISTURBANCE AT THE DOOR OF THE ROOM, and another man pushed into the room. A uniformed officer was holding onto his arm and trying to pull him back out, but the newcomer was exhibiting quite a bit of strength for someone who looked so lanky

and underfed. Shayne knew him, too.

"What is this?" Timothy Rourke asked angrily. "I just found out that Mike's been here in the hospital all day. What kind of cover-up are you trying to pull, Painter?"

"I tried to keep him out, Chief," the uniformed cop said quickly. "I know you didn't want any reporters in here —"

"No reporters, eh?" Rourke cut in. "Sounds like a conspiracy to me, Painter." He glanced over at Gentry. "What's the story, Will? I know you'll play square with me."

Before Gentry could answer, Painter said hotly, "You're disobeying a police order, Rourke. Now get out of here before I run you in."

Rourke, the top reporter for the Miami *Daily News*, ignored Painter and came a step closer to the bed. A man in a white coat appeared at his side and put a restraining hand on his arm. He said, "Please, sir. This is a hospital, you know. Disturbances like this —"

Shayne recognized the voice as the one that had spoken a few moments earlier and knew the man must be a doctor. His request worked where Painter's bluster had not. Rourke drew back slightly, still frowning and staring at the bed.

Gentry said softly, "We don't know what happened, Tim. Mike came into Painter's office and caused some sort of trouble, then passed out for no reason."

"Some sort of trouble?" Painter echoed sarcastically. "He tried to kill me!"

That made several times Shayne had heard that, and it didn't make any more sense now than the first time. Keeping quiet wasn't going to gain him anything more; it was time to let them know he was awake.

"What the hell's going on here?"

The words came out of his mouth in a dry, choked voice, barely more than a whisper, but they had as much effect as a shout would have. The people in the room immediately crowded around the bed, firing questions until the doctor raised his voice and cut them all off. "Stand back!" he ordered.

Shayne had his eyes open all the way now. The doctor took a small light from his pocket and held the eyelids even further apart, shining the light into Shayne's pupils. He considered for a moment and made contemplative noises, then asked, "How do you feel, Mr. Shayne?"

"Sort of groggy," Shayne said. "But I'm all right."

"Being groggy is a natural reaction. You've been unconscious since about ten o'clock this morning."

"What time is it now?"

"Just after eight in the evening."

Shayne sighed. Ten hours gone out of his life . . . .

IT WAS WORSE THAN THAT, THOUGH, AS HE FOUND OUT IN the next few minutes. Painter all but shoved the doctor aside and snapped, "You might as well not try any funny stuff, Shayne. We've got you this time, and you won't be wiggling out of it."

Shayne would have almost gone back to being unconscious, rather than have to listen to Painter, he thought, but he forced himself to concentrate and said, "What are you talking about, Petey?"

Painter's face was red with anger. "I'm talking about you coming into my office as bold as brass and shooting at me. It was a damn stupid stunt, Shayne. I've got plenty of cops as witnesses that you tried to murder me."

"I don't care what you say," Gentry grunted. "Mike wouldn't do a thing like that. If he had a grudge to settle, he might break your jaw, Painter, but he wouldn't try to kill you."

"I'm sorry, Chief, but I've got to agree with Chief Gentry," Terry put in. "I just can't believe what you said."

Rourke came closer to the bed as Painter got more and more angry. The thin reporter said, "What about it, mike? Is Painter full of hot air, as usual?"

Shayne looked around at the faces hovering over him and then said slowly, "I don't have the slightest idea what any of you are talking about."

Painter threw his hands up. "I knew it! Dammit, Shayne, don't think you can get away with an amnesia plea. I've got *witnesses* —"

Gentry leaned over the bed and said to Shayne, "Painter says you came into his office this morning acting real friendly and then pulled out your gun and started blasting at him. Do you remember that at all, Mike?"

Shayne shook his head. "Petey's slipped a gear, Will. I'd never act friendly toward him."

"What about shooting at me?" Painter demanded. Emotion made his voice quiver.

"He does have witnesses, Mike," Gentry said. "I've been hanging around here most of the day since I heard about it, and I had a chance to talk to some of the men who captured you in Painter's office. They saw you take at least one shot at him, and his secretary can testify that you and Painter were alone in there when other shots were fired. But I know there has to be more to the story."

Shayne closed his eyes for a long moment and swallowed. When he opened them, he said, "I don't remember any of this, Will. The last

thing I remember is going to my office this morning." Something else suddenly occurred to Shayne, and he asked, "Where's Lucy?"

Gentry frowned. "None of us have seen her. We figured she was out of town or something. You mean you don't know?"

"She was at the office . . ." Shayne bit back a curse. If only it wasn't so damned hard to think! His strength seemed to be coming back to him now, but so many things were still fuzzy in his head.

The doctor stepped in again. "Really, I insist you all step back and let me examine Mr. Shayne more closely. In fact, why don't you all wait out in the hall?"

Gentry, Rourke, and Terry Denton left the room grudgingly, but Painter paused before going. He jabbed a finger at Shayne and barked, "I'm not falling for this! As soon as the doctor says you're all right, there's a cell waiting for you!"

**SHAYNE LAY STILL AND LET THE DOCTOR EXAMINE HIM** after the door had swung shut behind Painter. The medico poked and probed and shone his little light, asking simple questions about what Shayne's name was and what city they were in as he worked. When he was finished a few minutes later, he straightened and said, "Well, Mr. Shayne, you seem perfectly fit. We went all over you while you were out, and you have no wounds that would have caused you to even lose consciousness, let alone stay out for ten hours. And there's no sign of any concussion or head injury that might explain your memory lapse."

"You're saying I'm all right?" Shayne asked.

"Medically speaking."

"Then I can get out of here?"

"I think Chief Painter is going to have some say about that. He's been here ever since you were brought in this morning in a police ambulance, and frankly, he's been driving us all crazy with his raving about what he's going to do to you. That man is not your friend, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne had to grin at the understatement. "Tell me something I don't know. Like what happened today."

"I wish I could." The doctor shook his head. "I would like to keep you here overnight, for observation. I don't think Painter will mind that, especially if he's got a guard outside. Chief Gentry has done a remarkable job just to keep him from blowing up entirely."

"Good old Will," Shayne murmured. Without warning, he pushed the covers off of him and swung his legs to the side, letting them drop toward the floor and sitting up.

The doctor took a quick step forward and said worriedly, "I don't

think that's a good idea, Mr. Shayne —”

“You said I was all right,” Shayne insisted. “I’m feeling stronger every second, and my head doesn’t hurt nearly as much now. I’d like to get out of this place if I can.”

Steadying himself with one hand on the bed, Shayne let his weight fall onto his legs and raised himself from the bed. He stood still for a moment, until he was sure he wasn’t going to fall flat on his face, then took a few steps, acutely aware of the loosely-fitting hospital gown he wore. He said, “Where are my clothes?”

“In the closet,” the doctor said. “But I strongly advise against this, Mr. Shayne.”

“You’re on record. And thanks for your help, Doc. Now, get Gentry for me, will you?”

The doctor went to the door, opened it slightly, and said, “Chief Gentry, would you come in, please?” It was Painter who appeared in the door and bulled past the doctor, though. He advanced toward the standing Shayne, bristling like a quarrelsome terrier.

“Thought you’d sneak out of here, did you?” he yelped. “We’ll see about that. You’re coming with me.”

Gentry came into the room after him and said heavily, “I thought you said you’d be reasonable about this, Painter. How about releasing Shayne into my custody?”

“What? He tried to kill me, I’m not going to release —”

“In my custody, Painter? I give you my word he’ll be available when you want him.”

Shayne smiled. Gentry had put Painter in a bad position. The Miami chief was a highly respected man, and his word was about as reliable as you could get. To deny Gentry’s request would be to insult him, and Shayne knew Painter would think twice before he would publicly doubt the word of Will Gentry. The little man glared from Shayne to Gentry and back to Shayne, then heaved a sigh and said, “Oh, all right. But there’s going to be an investigation into this matter, Gentry, don’t think there won’t be. Nothing’s going to swept under the rug.”

“That’s fine. Mike, what do you say to going home?”

“The doctor here wants me to stay the night, Will, but I don’t think so. Hand me my clothes, will you?”

Painter gave them one more sulfurous look and then stalked out of the room.

Shayne dressed quickly and then went out into the hall with Gentry. Rourke and Terry were waiting there, and they immediately asked Shayne if he was all right.

“I seem to be, other than having the hell confused out of me,” he

told them. "Will's offered to take me home, and I'm going to take him up on it."

"How about if I tag along?" Rourke asked. "This is a damned screwy business, Mike. Maybe between the three of us we can make some sense of it."

"Between the four of us, you mean," Terry put in. "I'm going along, too."

Shayne put a hand on her arm. "Thanks for the offer, Terry, but I'd rather you didn't. Painter can't do anything to hurt Will and Tim for siding with me on this, but you have to work for the man. Maybe you'd better stay out of it."

"I'm your friend, too, aren't I?" she demanded.

"Damn right. That's why I'm telling you to butt out."

Terry opened her mouth to protest more, but she saw the look in Shayne's grey eyes and didn't say anything. She nodded, then said, "Whatever you want, Mike. You know that."

"Sure. And thanks for being here when I came to."

He squeezed her shoulder, then started down the hall with Gentry and Rourke. They kept quiet as they walked with him out of the hospital, and it wasn't until all three of them were in Gentry's car in the parking lot that they let the questions out.

"What's the story, Mike?" Gentry growled. "On the level."

"What I said in there was on the level. I don't know anything about trying to kill Painter."

"But he's got witnesses," Rourke said. "Even if none of us put much stock in anything Petey has to say, we can't claim his men are all suffering from delusions. They *saw* you shooting at him."

Shayne found a cigarette and lit it gratefully. He wished he had a drink, too, and he knew that the first thing he was going to do when he got back to his apartment was put himself around several fingers of cognac. "I don't have any answers," he said to Gentry and Rourke. "I wish I did. You can bet I'm going to find some, though."

HE SETTLED BACK AGAINST THE SEAT AND LOOKED OUT AT nighttime Miami Beach passing by. Gentry piloted the car across Biscayne Bay on one of the causeways and turned toward Shayne's Second Avenue apartment.

They were passing a bank when Shayne suddenly sat up straight and stared. Rourke saw the reaction and asked, "What's wrong, Mike? Did you remember something?"

Shayne was turning his head and craning his neck to look behind them. He was watching the big lighted sign on the bank's parking lot

that gave the time, temperature, and date. He muttered, "July 20th. That's wrong, isn't it? It's only the 19th."

Gentry and Rourke both shook their heads. "No, Mike," Gentry said. "It's the 20th, all right."

Shayne reached up, his fingers finding the lobe of his left ear and tugging on it as he thought. "You mean it's Tuesday? That can't be, Will. The last thing I remember before waking up in the hospital tonight was going into the office on *Monday* morning."

"Son of a bitch," Rourke breathed. "You're not missing ten hours, Mike. It's more like thirty-six!"

There was a new urgency in Shayne's voice as he said, "Can you patch in a call to Lucy's apartment on your radio, Will?"

"Sure thing." Gentry grabbed the microphone from under the dash and started talking into it.

"This puts a whole new light on Lucy not being around, doesn't it?" Rourke asked Shayne. "You remember her being in the office yesterday morning?"

"Just like always," Shayne nodded. Grim lines were etched into his lean face now. Lucy Hamilton was his secretary, but she was more than that to him and had been for as long as he had known her. He was special to her, too, and it had been bothering him that she hadn't been at the hospital. But he had been willing not to worry about it too much as long as he thought he was only blank on part of a day. But now that he knew the missing gap was really a day and a half . . . Something must have happened to her to keep her from coming to the hospital. He was sure she would have heard about his alleged attempt on Painter's life and his subsequent trip to the hospital.

Gentry's communications officers had the phone patch through now, and Shayne listened bleakly to the ringing on the other end. It went on for what seemed like an eternity before Gentry told his men to forget it. Shayne said, "Will?"

Gentry was already turning the wheel and changing the course of the car. "On the way, Mike," he said.

LUCY'S APARTMENT WASN'T TOO FAR FROM SHAYNE'S, AND it didn't take them long to get there. Shayne didn't wait for the elevator when they got to the apartment house, but bounded up the stairs instead. Gentry and Rourke followed closely behind him. For someone who spent the day out cold, Shayne was showing no ill effects now.

Shayne rapped brawny knuckles against the door of Lucy's apartment, waited a second, then knocked again. He called through the door, "Angel, it's me!"

There was no response.

Shayne's hand went into his pocket and came out with a ring of keys. The one that unlocked the door was on there, and he had it open a second later. Flipping the lights on, he strode in with Gentry and Rourke at his heels.

"Lucy!" Shayne called.

Still no answer.

His face a grim mask, Shayne searched the place quickly. It didn't take long. There was no sign of Lucy Hamilton.

Gentry looked around and said, "Doesn't appear to have been a struggle. Could she have left you a note, Mike?"

"I already checked for one. She's just not here, Will."

Shayne's voice was under control, but both of his friends knew from the tightness of it how upset he was. Rourke suggested, "How about friends of hers, Mike? Why don't you call around and ask if anyone's seen her?"

"Good idea," Shayne said. He strode over to the telephone and was about to pick it up when he stopped abruptly. His forehead furrowed, the craggy red brows drawing down into a frown.

"What is it, Mike?" Gentry asked.

Shayne pointed to the small table on which the telephone sat. "There's no notepad," he said. "Lucy always keeps a notepad there."

Rourke shrugged. "Maybe she ran out of pads and forgot to get more." He knew that wasn't like Lucy, who was a model of efficiency, though.

Shayne was looking around with a new keenness now. He knelt beside a heavy armchair and pointed at the floor. "Look at this," he said. "You can see part of a dent in the carpet beside each leg. This chair's been moved and put back by somebody who didn't know the difference. Same thing with that one over there."

"That doesn't necessarily mean anything, Mike," Gentry said. But he was frowning, too.

A framed picture stood on another table. Shayne went to it and studied it without touching it. He said, "This picture of us is angled wrong. And there's a little crack in one corner of the glass. You'd better get some fingerprint people here, Will. There's been a struggle, and somebody besides Lucy tried to make it look like there hasn't."

"Are you sure about that, Mike? After all, you've had a rough time of it —"

"Then where is she, Will?" Shayne shook his head. "She's gone. And somebody's got her."

## III

FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, THE THREE OF THEM WERE ON their way to Shayne's office. Gentry had called for a crew from the police lab to go over Lucy's apartment, and then he had joined Rourke in urging Shayne to go on back to his apartment and get some rest.

Shayne shook his head stubbornly. "I rested all day. Sorry, fellas, but I've got to get to the bottom of this."

"It's pretty strange, all right," Rourke nodded. "You lose your memory and take pot shots at Painter, and then Lucy disappears. A couple of things that off-the-wall have to be connected."

"You're not helping," Gentry growled at the lanky reporter. "Mike's in no shape to—"

"I'll decide what I'm in shape for," Shayne cut in. "The doctor said they couldn't find anything wrong with me. I want to head over to the office and see if I can find out what case, if any, I was working on."

There was no arguing with the big redhead detective, so as soon as the police technicians arrived to dust Lucy's apartment for fingerprints and look for any other evidence, Shayne, Rourke, and Gentry piled back into Gentry's car and headed to the office on Flagler Street where Shayne had done business for years.

As they drove through the streets of Miami, Shayne thought of a question he hadn't asked yet. He said, "Where's my Buick, Will?"

"Painter's men found it parked on the street not far from Miami Beach headquarters. They've got it impounded in their garage. I wouldn't count on getting it back too soon, Mike. Painter's going to make everything as difficult for you as he can."

Shayne's mouth quirked in an ironic grin. "You can't really blame him. After all, I guess I did try to kill him, even if I don't remember it at all."

"I've been thinking about that," Rourke said from the back seat. "Maybe I've got an explanation for that."

"Save it," Gentry grunted. "We're here."

He parked in a no-parking zone right in front of the building, knowing that his car would be safe there, and the three of them took the elevator up to the second floor after ringing for the night watchman to let them in. Shayne led the way down the corridor toward the door of his office, the key in his hand. All of his personal possessions had seemed to be in order when he woke up, including all his keys. He thrust it in the lock, snapped the bolt back, and twisted the knob with his other hand.

Shayne knew something was wrong as soon as he stepped into the

room and turned the lights on. There was nothing obviously out of place; everything looked neat and tidy.

Just like it had in Lucy Hamilton's apartment . . . .

SHAYNE'S LONG LEGS CARRIED HIM TO LUCY'S DESK. He checked all through the drawers, finding the usual office supplies. Then he went over to the door of the inner office, his personal office, and went in there. Gentry and Rourke watched almost wordlessly, only exchanging an occasional comment between themselves in low voices.

The desk in the inner office was old, wooden, and heavy. Scars covered a lot of its surface. But Shayne had used it for years and was comfortable with it. Now he started jerking open the drawers in it, scattering the paperwork in them over the top of the desk, pawing through it with a scowl on his face. When he was done with that, he went to the file cabinet in the corner, unlocked it, and proceeded to do the same thing.

Gentry and Rourke knew what he was looking for, but they also knew that he could look better if they stayed out of his way. Shayne's actions became more urgent, his face more strained, as he searched through the office.

"It's not here," he said finally. "There's just nothing here."

"Nothing to tell you what case you were working on, or even *if* you were working on a case?" Gentry asked.

"Nothing to tell me anything about yesterday. No notes, no schedules, no client contracts. It's just like yesterday didn't exist as far as this office goes."

"Would Lucy have had any reason to take out everything pertaining to yesterday?" Rourke said. "I know it doesn't sound like her, but . . ."

Shayne shook his head. "I don't know, Tim. There'd have to be an awfully urgent reason."

Gentry voiced what they were all thinking. "This is like back at her apartment. The place is all neat and clean, and it's only after you start looking at something in specific that you realize there's something wrong. I'll get my men over here, too, Mike."

"They won't find anything," Shayne declared. "Whoever's behind this is being almighty careful. They don't want any kind of a trail behind them, even a completely cold one."

"What now?" The question came from Rourke.

Shayne heaved a long, heavy sigh. "It looks like a dead end. Will's boys will take care of questioning that list of Lucy's friends I gave them. Until we come up with some more information somehow, there's

not much else we can do."

"Now you're being reasonable." Gentry stuck another of his never-ending supply of odorous cigars in his mouth and went on, "Come on, Mike. I'll take you home."

Rourke remained part of the group for the moment, and he could tell by the look on Shayne's face how upset the big redhead was. If there was anything Shayne hated, it was feeling helpless, especially where Lucy was concerned.

There wasn't much conversation between them as they headed toward Shayne's apartment a few minutes later. They were inside the old building on Second Avenue, near the Miami River, before Shayne brought up something from earlier.

"You claimed you had a theory, Tim," he said. "That's more than I've got, so let's hear it."

They were riding the elevator up to Shayne's floor. Rourke lit a cigarette and leaned against the wall of the car, saying, "You understand; this is just a theory about why you can't remember trying to kill Painter, not an explanation of why it happened."

"Give," Gentry growled.

"It's simple. Mike, I think you were hypnotized."

Gentry's eyebrows shot upwards in disbelief, but Shayne only looked speculative. The burly chief said, "Hypnotized? That stuff is a lot of bunk, Rourke!"

Rourke shook his head. "Not according to the scientists. Hypnosis is being used more and more in everyday life, to do everything from helping people to lose weight or to quit smoking to helping police dredge up hidden memories from witnesses to crimes. You should look into it, Will."

As the elevator stopped and the doors slid open, Shayne said, "You think I was hypnotized to kill Painter and not remember anything about it afterwards?"

"It goes a long way toward explaining what happened. You could have been given some sort of post-hypnotic command —"

"You're joking," Gentry interjected.

"No such thing. It's possible. I try to keep up with all the latest advances in science, Mike, and hypnosis is included in that."

"Would hypnosis explain why I passed out?"

Rourke shrugged his bony shoulders. "I don't see why not. That could have been part of the post-hypnotic command. I can't say for sure, of course, and I can't tell you what the motivation would be for somebody to hypnotize you into becoming a murderer."

Gentry obviously didn't believe a word of Rourke's theory, but

Shayne decided the best course to take at the moment would be to keep an open mind. As weird as this business was, anything was possible.

He asked the two of them in for a drink, and they accepted. Gentry expressed a worry about leaving Shayne there alone, but Shayne assured him he would be all right. "I'm going to call for a man to stay on your door, anyway," Gentry declared. "It'll make me feel better."

"It won't make me feel better, Will," Shayne said tactfully. "I can take care of myself."

Shayne had looked around the living room when they arrived, and he was fairly certain that it hadn't been gone through the way Lucy's place and the office had been. Whether the people behind the trouble just hadn't gotten around to it yet, or whether they already knew that he didn't have anything incriminating to them here, Shayne didn't know.

Gentry polished off his drink and set the glass down, then said, "I've got to be going, Mike, if you're sure you'll be all right here by yourself."

"And you don't have to be by yourself," Rourke put in. "I've slept on your sofa before, and I can do it again."

"Get out of here, both of you," Shayne said gruffly. "I thought you wanted me to get some sleep."

"I'll call you right away if I hear anything," Gentry promised.

"Thanks, Will," Shayne said, holding a glass with some Martell still in the bottom.

He closed the door on them as Rourke was asking Gentry for a ride back to his car, which was still in Miami Beach. Shayne smiled tiredly and didn't bother worrying about how that one would turn out.

His mind was still full of Lucy's disappearance and the other strange events of the day, but his body was starting to slow down again. He tossed off the rest of the liquor. It would feel good to lay down in bed and try to sleep a natural sleep this time.

Shayne turned the living room lights out and went into his bedroom, leaving the lights there off to start with. He took off his coat, yanked his tie from around his neck, and started working on the buttons of his shirt as he sat down on the edge of the bed in the darkness.

"Hey!" a startled feminine voice yelped.

#### IV

SHAYNE'S HANDS SHOT OUT INSTINCTIVELY, GRABBING THE form that he sensed in the bed beside him. His fingers closed on warm, bare flesh, and the woman gasped as he pulled her against him.

From what he was feeling, Shayne thought the woman wasn't carrying any weapons, other than what nature had given her. As her small fists beat against his chest, she said hotly, "Let me, go, dammit! Let me go!"

"Hold on there!" Shayne snapped back. "Just take it easy. I'm not going to hurt you."

Some of the fight seemed to go out of her then, as if his words had pacified her somehow. She quit hitting him and said, "Mr. Shayne?"

"That's right. But who the hell —"

His question was cut off by a sudden embrace as she sagged against him and threw her arms around his neck. Burying her face against his chest, she almost sobbed, "Oh, I was so scared! I thought they had caught up to me again. I'm so glad it's you, Mr. Shayne."

For a split-second, just after he had sat down and the woman had cried out, Shayne had thought that he had found Lucy accidentally. But now, after hearing the voice several times, he was sure that it didn't belong to her. Something about the voice seemed familiar, but Shayne couldn't pin down just what it was.

He disentangled himself from her arms and stood up, crossing to the light switch by the door in two long strides. He was prepared for the sudden illumination as he flipped it up, but the young blond woman in his bed wasn't. She flinched as the light hit her eyes and pulled the sheet up further around her nude form.

As far as he could remember, Shayne had never seen her before in his life.

She opened her mouth, but before she could say anything more, Shayne held up a hand and stopped her. "Wait a minute," he said. "First of all, why don't you tell me who you are?"

There was a puzzled frown on the attractive face. "What do you mean, tell you who I am? You couldn't have forgotten that quick, even if you didn't find Marty."

"Marty?" Shayne was watching her closely. He had already scanned the room. Her bra and panties were at the foot of the bed, but there was no sign of outer clothes.

"Yes, my brother Marty." A despairing look crossed her face. "Please don't go spacey on me, Mr. Shayne. I need help bad. Somebody tried to kill me earlier today!"

Shayne took a deep breath. He wanted another drink, but he wanted information more. Slowly, he said, "Just tell me your name."

"It's Kelly, Kelly Warren. I hired you yesterday, remember?"

"Do you have any proof of those statements?"

She nodded, obviously still baffled by Shayne's reactions. "In my

purse. It's in the bathroom. My clothes are in there drying, too. I borrowed your shower and then tried to get the grease off my clothes."

Shayne stepped into the bathroom and saw the purse lying on a chair. There were clothes, a pair of jeans and a bright blouse, draped over the towel rack by the tub. He picked up the purse and opened it as he went back into the bedroom.

The wallet he found inside told him that her name was Kelly Warren, all right. She had a New York driver's license to prove it. And folded up behind a sheaf of bills was a receipt made out in the same name. What really clinched matters for Shayne, though, was that the receipt was for the retainer she had paid him. It was made out in Lucy's neat handwriting, and it was dated the day before.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE HAD A CONCRETE LEAD TO WHAT had happened to him during those missing hours of his life. And he was sure that when he found out what had happened to him, he would know what had become of Lucy, too.

"Humor me," he said. "Start at the very beginning. Tell me everything that happened yesterday and today."

Kelly Warren looked exasperated, but she said, "Well, all right, if that's what you want. I came to see you as soon as I got off the plane at the airport and rented a car. I knew you're supposed to be the best private detective in this area. I figured you could find Marty if anybody could.

"You flew in from where? New York?"

"Right. That's where my family lives. When I decided to come down here to find Marty, I asked one of Daddy's lawyers to help me find a good private detective. It was your name he came up with."

"Marty is your brother? And he's missing here in Miami?"

She nodded. "This is the last place we heard from him. He didn't give us his address or anything, but we did get a card from him. He mentioned that he was working in a nightclub. The card was post-marked in Miami Beach. That was two months ago."

It was the type of situation Shayne had encountered many times in the past. He said, "What happened? Did your brother get into trouble with your parents and run off down here, and now you all want him to come back?"

"That's it exactly. It was just a stupid fight with Daddy; Marty didn't have to take off like that. My mother and I finally decided it was time we did something about it. That's why I came down here."

"Where you hired me to find your brother." It was a statement this

time from Shayne, not a question.

"If he was still around here." Her bare shoulders lifted in a pretty shrug. "If he wasn't, well, I was hoping you could at least get a lead on where he had gone."

Shayne shook out a cigarette and lit it. Kelly shook her head at the offer of one. Shayne thought over what she had told him, his brain weighing the facts of her story. He said, "What happened after you hired me?"

"You told me you'd let me know as soon as you found out anything definite. I went on to the hotel where I had a room reserved and waited. Then you called early yesterday evening and said you thought you had a lead. You were going to call me later on and let me know how it worked out."

"Only I never did."

"Only you never did. I worried, of course, and then today when I tried to get hold of you, there was no answer at either your office or here. I went by the office, but it was closed up. I really didn't know what to do."

"You haven't seen or spoken to my secretary, Miss Hamilton, since you were in the office yesterday?"

Kelly shook her head, making her shoulder-length blond hair swing from side to side. "Not at all."

"How did you wind up here —" Shayne gestured. "— like that?"

A faint blush covered the creamy skin that Shayne could see, and he was sure it extended even further. She said, "I was on my way over here from your office, just to check and see if you were here, when a car tried to run over me."

"Deliberately?"

"It sure looked like it. It came right up on the sidewalk. I managed to jump out of its way, but I got grease all over myself from the alley I landed in. That scared me, Mr. Shayne. I don't know why anybody would want to kill me, but I do know I was afraid to go back to my hotel. If they knew who I was, then they might know where I was staying. I came on here and got the clerk downstairs to let me in. I told him I was a client of yours and showed him the receipt to prove it. And you know about the shower and the clothes drying in the bathroom . . ."

"Yeah," Shayne grunted. He ran his thumbnail along his jawline, feeling it rasp on the day's stubble. He was thinking furiously now.

"Any more trouble since you got here?" he asked.

"Not a bit. Do you think that it's all tied together, Mr. Shayne? I mean my hiring you, and then that car trying to hit me?"

"Unless you want to believe in some pretty strange coincidences, it

is.' He put the cigarette out in an ashtray sitting on a chest. "Get your clothes on," he told her. "We've got some things to do. I'll be out in the living room."

He reached into the bathroom and picked up her clothes, only slightly damp now, and tossed them onto the bed, then withdrew into the living room. He left the door into the bedroom open several inches, though, and he took the spare gun he always kept in the apartment and slipped it in his pocket after checking the cylinder.

When Kelly emerged a few minutes later, dressed but still very attractive, she said, "What's going on, Mr. Shayne? Something's very wrong, isn't it?"

"It looks that way," Shayne said bleakly. He had been thinking about Kelly's story. It all hung together, and she told it with complete sincerity. She was either a fantastic actress, or she was telling him the truth. He decided to tell her the truth, too. "You might as well know, I've suffered a memory loss. I don't remember you hiring me, and I don't remember anything about whether or not I found your brother. But I know a way we may be able to find out."

"You've got amnesia?" Kelly exclaimed. "How awful!"

"We're going to get the answers, though," Shayne promised her. "You can count on that."

**AS THEY RODE DOWN IN THE ELEVATOR, HE ASKED, "What were you planning to do in my apartment, wait for me, however long it took?"**

"I don't know anyone in Miami except you and Miss Hamilton. I didn't know what else to do."

Shayne wondered if that had been her only reason as they walked out of the elevator into the lobby of the building. He said, "My car's not available right now. I think you said you've got a rental car?"

"Yes, it's parked just down the street. Do you want to use it?" She started digging in her purse for the keys.

"Thanks," Shayne said, taking them from her.

The car was an American-made compact, which made it a little difficult for Shayne to be comfortable with his long legs, but at least it was transportation until he got his Buick back. He pulled it away from the curb, into the nighttime traffic, and pointed it toward the Flagler Street office.

While he didn't remember anything he had done the day before after coming into the office, he knew how he would start conducting an investigation such as the one Kelly Warren had hired him for. He would begin with the legwork, only most of it would be done over the

phone. If there was a past indication that Marty Warren worked in a nightclub, then Shayne would have called every nightclub in Miami and Miami Beach and asked to talk to him. The chances were, that if Warren hadn't moved on, such a strategy would turn him up.

He didn't explain any of this to Kelly. There was a slim chance that whoever had gone back over his office and removed everything related to the business of the day before had missed one thing. But he didn't want to get Kelly's hopes up until he had checked out his theory.

**THERE WAS NO TROUBLE ON THE WAY TO THE OFFICE, AND** the building itself was quiet once they were inside. The night watchman let them in, and he told Shayne that there had been no visitors looking for him since the end of business hours.

Shayne went directly into his private office and opened a drawer in the desk, hauling out a thick Miami-Miami Beach Yellow Pages directory. When he found the section that listed nightclubs, he started running his eyes down the columns carefully. Kelly watched him, frowning, until Shayne suddenly jabbed a blunt finger at the book and grinned.

"There it is," he said, pointing to a telephone number that was faintly underlined. "I think there's a good chance we'll find out something about your brother."

Kelly peered at the listing from beside him and said, "The Magic Grotto. What's that?"

"A club over in Miami Beach. I've never been there and don't know anything about it . . . at least not that I can recall. Maybe I did go there last night. Maybe that's why I've got a gap in my memory today."

Kelly's blue eyes met his grey ones. She said, "Are we going over there now?"

"I am."

"Then I'm going with you. If somebody's really out to get me, I know I'll feel a lot safer being with you."

Shayne wasn't sure he liked her coming with him on this part of the investigation, but he didn't have any better suggestions at the moment. If she really was in danger, it was probably a good idea that she didn't go back to her hotel.

His hunch had paid off about the telephone book. He knew that he sometimes doodled a bit when he was doing tedious phone work, and he hadn't thought that whoever had been in his office would have gone so far as to take his telephone book. The fact that he couldn't remember ever having reason to call the Magic Grotto before yesterday told him that it was probably related to the case he was handling for Kelly.

He felt confident as they rode down in the elevator and started back toward the rented car that a visit to the Magic Grotto would pay important dividends. It wouldn't surprise him if they found Marty Warren himself there.

Shayne reached for the handle of the passenger door, opening it for Kelly. She smiled and said, "Thank you."

And then grunted in pain and fell against him as the crack of a gun echoed in the still night air.

## V

THE NEXT FEW SECONDS SEEMED TO PASS IN SLOW MOTION for Shayne. He saw the sudden patch of red on Kelly's blouse and the slack, pain-filled expression on her face. As something whined past his ear, only inches away, he grabbed her arms and flung both of them down to the sidewalk.

There was another shot, and a slug whined off the hood of the car. Shayne was lying half on top of Kelly. He jerked his gun out of his pocket as he looked the girl over closely. She was breathing rapidly and harshly, and her face had gone pale. She didn't appear to have been hit after the first shot, which had clipped her high on the right side. Shayne didn't think the wound would be serious, if she received prompt medical attention.

And if they didn't both get killed first.

The car was between them and the sniper now. Shayne risked a glance over the hood of the car and drew another shot, the bullet whipping past him and thudding into the wall of the building behind him. He triggered off a return shot and then ducked back down.

Kelly's eyes, which had been closed, were flickering open now. A low moan escaped her lips, and she said, "What . . . I'm hurt . . . What . . ."

"Lie still," Shayne rapped at her. "Somebody's shooting at us. You're hit, but you're going to be all right."

He hoped that someone had heard the shots and was calling for the cops and an ambulance by now. As he crouched there, he calculated the gunman's approximate position and looked for some way to turn the tables on him. Whoever was firing the shots was down the block, on the opposite side of the street. Parked in front of Kelly's rented car was another vehicle, and on the sidewalk beside it was a large trash can.

Shayne broke cover with two quick running steps, then dove behind the other car. He had only been exposed for a splitsecond, but that had

been long enough for the would-be killer to get a shot off at him. Now, as he ducked behind the car, his free hand hit the trash can and sent it skittering and falling down the sidewalk.

That drew a shot, too, but this time Shayne was ready. As the sniper drilled the trash can with a neatly-placed slug, Shayne stood up and fired three quick shots of his own at the muzzle flash.

The gunman must not have figured on so much opposition. Shayne saw a shape suddenly break away from a patch of shadows and start running. The big redhead fired twice more, but the fleeing man didn't break stride. He ducked to the side and disappeared in the mouth of an alley.

Shayne thought about giving chase, but then he cast a glance over his shoulder at Kelly. She was still lying next to the curb, bloody and pain-wracked. Shayne's mouth stretched in an angry grimace. He put the gun away and went back to kneel beside her.

"Take it easy," he told her, stroking her pallid cheek. "There'll be an ambulance here soon." He could see the night watchman of the office building, peering out uncertainly through the glass doors. "Call the cops and an ambulance!" Shayne called to him.

Kelly's eyes didn't want to focus properly because of the pain and shock, but she turned them in Shayne's general direction and said in a ragged whisper, "Mr. Shayne . . . you've got to . . . got to keep looking . . . Find Marty . . ."

"I'll find him," Shayne promised, taking one of her hands in both of his and squeezing. Her small, slender hand was almost lost in his grip.

He intended to keep that promise. There had never been any doubt in his mind that this was a serious business, and each succeeding event had only convinced him more. This murder attempt, coming on top of Lucy's strange disappearance and his own attempt on Painter's life, made Shayne's expression bleak and unpleasant.

A BLACK-AND-WHITE WITH TWO OF GENTRY'S OFFICERS IN IT showed up first. Shayne could tell from the questions that one of the cops asked him while the other gave some emergency first aid to Kelly that they knew nothing about the events earlier in the day. They did know who he was, though, and seemed to accept the story he told them. Shayne edited it to a certain extent, leaving out any mention of Painter or Lucy's disappearance. He simply said that Kelly had been to see him on a professional matter and that they had been attacked as they left the building. The watchman confirmed that much; he had seen most of it from inside.

The ambulance arrived while Shayne was giving his statement, and he was a little distracted by the paramedics and what they were doing

to help Kelly. They seemed competent, though, and within moments, they had her ready to load into the ambulance for the fast trip to the hospital. Shayne stepped over to the stretcher they had her on now and said, "Don't worry about a thing, Kelly. I'll take care of it for you."

Her lips formed the name of her brother. Shayne nodded and told her again not to worry. Then the attendants were lifting her and putting her in the back of the ambulance and shutting the doors behind her.

"You going along to the hospital?" one of the cops asked Shayne.

He shook his head. "I don't think so. Not until later, anyway."

"Suit yourself. One of our detectives'll probably want to ask you some questions about this."

"Sure." Shayne still had the keys to the rental car. He moved over to it and said over his shoulder, "They all know where to find me."

He heaved a sigh of relief as he pulled away from the curb and turned onto Biscayne Boulevard at the corner. It wouldn't have surprised him if the police had detained him, and he didn't want to have to waste that time. Too much time had slipped by already, while he was lying senseless in a Miami Beach hospital. This case had been heating up ever since the day before, and a lot could have happened in that time.

A brief pang of guilt went through him; part of him had wanted to go with Kelly Warren to the hospital. But he couldn't do anyone any good sitting around a hospital. It was much better all around if he was out trying to track down some answers to the questions that were plaguing him.

Why had someone shot Kelly, and who had pulled the trigger? What had happened during the missing hours, and why had he tried to kill Peter Painter? And the one that was preying on his mind the most, what had happened to Lucy Hamilton?

Shayne hoped a visit to the Magic Grotto would give him at least a few of the answers.

HE HAD NEVER BEEN TO THE PLACE BEFORE, BUT HE HAD NO trouble finding it. It was in a still-exclusive section of Miami Beach, not far from the waterfront. A high stone wall enclosed the property, with an arched gateway serving as the principal entrance. Shayne cruised around the block before turning in, and he noted a much plainer gate in the rear. As he turned the car between the pillars of the front gate, he spotted a tasteful sign announcing the name of the club and the fact that someone called the Amazing Carlton was appearing nightly.

The asphalt drive opened into a large parking lot not far inside the

wall. There were quite a few cars already there, Shayne saw as he found a space for his own. The club itself was in a low, sprawling Spanish structure that had probably been a private home at one time. It was surrounded by palm trees, and bright-colored lanterns sparkled in those trees. Shayne heard the soothing beat of well-played jazz floating through the air as he got out of the car and walked toward the building.

A lovely young woman in an elegant, low-cut gown met him just inside the heavy wooden doors. She gave him a dazzling smile and said, "Would you prefer the bar, sir, or would you like to dine this evening?"

An impulse made Shayne say, "The bar, I think."

"Yes, sir. Right through there."

She gestured through a wide doorway framed by sturdy-looking beams. Shayne stepped through into the shadowy interior of the bar, pausing to let his eyes adjust to the gloom. An easel set up just inside the door supported a poster with the Amazing Carlton's name on it again, but this time there was a picture to go along with the name.

The man in the picture wore a tuxedo like he had been born in it. He smiled into the camera with all the self-confidence, almost arrogance, in the world. His hair appeared to be prematurely white, as was the neat Van Dyke beard he wore.

Shayne looked from the man in the picture to the man standing on a small stage at the other end of the room. There was no doubt about it, it was the same man. As Shayne watched, he launched into a line of snappy patter and produced a bouquet of flowers, seemingly from empty air. There was a round of applause from the customers who sat at most of the tables in the large room.

The bar itself, which ran down one side of the room, was doing a good business, too, Shayne saw. He spotted several empty stools, though, and started toward one of them. When he was settled on it, he caught the eye of a red-jacketed bartender and said, "Martell, ice water on the side."

The man nodded and said, "Yes, sir."

Shayne turned his head so that he could see the stage again. There was something about the amazing Carlton that intrigued him, but the big detective couldn't say what it was just yet. The man in the tuxedo had just started his act, Shayne had already decided, judging by the tricks he was doing and the line of gab he was handing out. The tricks were fairly simple now, mostly routine palming jobs, and the patter didn't have a lot to cover up. It would get more complicated later in the act, to better distract the audience while the more difficult illusions were set up.

The bartender brought his drink, and Shayne took a healthy swallow from it thankfully. It had been a long day, even if he had spent a great deal of it unconscious for some unknown reason, and he was starting to get tired. Worrying about Lucy didn't help the strain he was feeling, either.

But as he watched the Amazing Carlton perform, Shayne had an uncanny tingle down his spine. He felt sure that all the answers were here in this nightclub. All he had to do was dig them out.

He turned his head slightly, scanning the crowd, and his drink almost stopped halfway to his mouth again as his eyes widened in surprised recognition.

Sitting two tables away from the stage was one of the most important men in the Miami area underworld.

**ALERTED NOW, SHAYNE LOOKED OVER THE REST OF THE** crowd. He saw at least half a dozen more men who he knew to be Mob figures, or who were at least reputed to have Mob tie-ins. Their presence meant one thing to Shayne — they wouldn't have been there in those numbers unless they felt safe, and that meant the nightclub itself had to have some sort of Mob connection. He had never heard anything about it, but it was possible that the place was even owned by the Mob.

If that was the case, Shayne knew he wasn't in a place that would be very safe for him. He had had plenty of run-ins with organized crime in the area, and he had usually come out on top. There was a grudging respect between Shayne and some of the members of the Mob, but most of them would be happy to see him dead.

He would just have to get on with his business and get out as soon as possible, Shayne decided. Summoning the bartender over again as he finished off his drink, Shayne ordered another and then said, "Marty around tonight?"

It was a long shot, Shayne knew, but it might bring him something worthwhile. If he was lucky, it might not get him killed.

It didn't, at least not right away. The bartender shrugged and said, "I haven't seen him, but he's supposed to be on duty later, if you want to hang around."

"Thanks," Shayne nodded. "I may just do that."

He tried not to show the jumble of emotions that were coursing through him. As simple as that, he had located Marty Warren. At least, there was a good chance he had. But had it been that simple the night before? Had he come here and asked the same question then, too? And if he had, what had happened after that?

His gaze went back to the Amazing Carlton, and his mind went back to the theory that Tim Rourke had advanced earlier — that Shayne had been hypnotized when he tried to kill Painter.

Carlton was proceeding further into his act now, and as Shayne watched, he called for volunteers from the audience to assist him. He got what he asked for in the persons of three men urged on by their wives, out-of-towners and tourists, by the way they dressed.

All of Shayne's attention was on the stage as the Amazing Carlton proceeded to hypnotize the three men into believing they were things they weren't. One thought he was a bird, another a bull, and the third was convinced he was totally naked. Shayne had always had his doubts about nightclub hypnotists and magicians, but what Carlton was doing certainly seemed real.

And then there were the flashes in Shayne's brain, the flashes of *deja vu* which told him he had been here before and seen the man in the tuxedo before.

For the big finish of the act, Carlton made the three hypnotized men disappear from a closed cabinet, and when they reappeared mysteriously behind a curtain on the opposite side of the stage, they were awake and remembered none of what they had done while they were under. Shayne's fingers were getting tighter on his cognac snifter all the time.

He had heard the stories about people only being able to be hypnotized when their mind was weaker than that of the hypnotist, but he knew that wasn't true; highly intelligent people were sometimes among the easiest subjects to hypnotize. But that didn't make him feel any better about having his will and his memory stripped from him like that. *If* that was what had happened, and he was coming to believe that it was with every second that passed.

The Amazing Carlton took his bows and then disappeared somewhere backstage. Shayne stood up, put bills on the bar to cover the drink and a tip, and started in that direction himself.

**NO ONE CHALLENGED HIM UNTIL HE HAD PUSHED BACK A heavy velvet drape covering a door close to the stage and found himself in a corridor that angled sharply to the left up ahead and led into the dressing room area. A tall, broad-shouldered man stood at the bend of the corridor. He wore an ill-fitted suit and was built like a cousin to a redwood tree. But he had a pleasantly ugly face and his voice, when he put up a hand to stop Shayne, wasn't overly rude or cruel.**

"What are you doing back here, fella? Employees and friends of the performers only."

"Then that's me," Shayne told him. "I'm one of the Amazing Carlton's friends."

A slightly suspicious frown came over the big man's face. "He never mentioned a big redhead guy like you. What's your name?"

Shayne had a broad grin on his face as he walked toward the man, who was obviously a guard. He said, "My name's Mike. I just heard about Carlton being here. Hell, he and I went to school together. You don't mind me dropping in to visit him, do you?"

He was talking fast, and it was all the guard could do to keep up with him. Shayne was past him by the time he had finished the lie, picking out the dressing room door that had Carlton's name on it. He pointed to the door and said to the big man, "That's where I'm going. It's all right, isn't it?"

The guard lifted mile-wide shoulders and let them drop. "I guess so, since you're an old friend and all. But you gotta take the responsibility if there's any trouble."

"Oh, I will," Shayne said under his breath. He was mentally giving thanks for not-so-bright thugs who got certain jobs simply because they were so big.

Shayne heard someone closer to the stage calling for Teddy, and the big guard turned and headed in that direction. That was a lucky break, being left alone in this hallway, and he intended to make the best of the opportunity. He stopped in front of Carlton's door and leaned close to it, hoping to hear something before he knocked on the door and confronted the man.

The sound of worried voices was his reward. Shayne was able to make out most of what they were saying.

"Well, dammit, did you even hit anything, or did you just waste ammunition?" That was Carlton's voice, angry and sharp.

"I did the best I could," came the reply from another man. "I'm pretty sure I hit Kelly, I just don't know how bad. Shayne I don't know about. He didn't move like a wounded man."

"Well, you'll just have to try not to worry about it. I did the job just before my last show, and a few hours from now, we'll be on our way to new lives, where nobody can hurt us."

"You make it sound awful good. Can I see the money, do you think, Carlton?"

"It looks just like two hundred thousand dollars."

"Yeah, but I never saw that much in one place before."

Shayne heard the snicking sound of a briefcase being unlatched. There was a sharp intake of breath inside the dressing room, and Shayne knew what was being exhibited — money. Where the two of

them had gotten it, and why they had felt the need to kidnap Lucy, to try to run down Kelly and then shoot her, and to try to shoot Shayne... Well, those were questions that Shayne intended to have the answers to very shortly.

He slipped the pistol out of his pocket, grasped it firmly in one hand, then jerked the dressing room door open with the other. Carlton and another man jumped in surprise and then looked at him wide-eyed. Shayne leveled the gun at them and barked, "Hold it, both of you! Just stand still. We've got a lot of talking to do." His eyes flicked over at the second man, a tall youngster with blond hair. Shayne's voice and face were grim as he went on, "I especially want to talk to a man who tries to kill his own sister, Warren. You are Marty Warren, aren't you?"

It wasn't the young man who answered, though. It was Carlton, and his initial surprise at Shayne's abrupt entry was gone. Now he said calmly, "You're in no position to dictate terms, Mr. Shayne."

"I've got the gun," Shayne said, very aware that Carlton had just called him by name, when he didn't remember ever meeting the man.

"Yes, you do have the gun," Carlton said. "But we have your Miss Hamilton, and if you want her to stay alive, you'll do everything I tell you to."

## VI

THE GUN IN SHAYNE'S HAND STAYED STEADY, NOT REVEALING the sudden wave of apprehension that went through him. He said, "You're bluffing."

"I assure you, I'm not." Even with a gun pointing at him, Carlton was cool and unruffled. "A friend of ours is holding Miss Hamilton and waiting for us. If we don't show up on schedule . . . well, things might get unpleasant for her."

The impulse to step across the room and slash the gun across Carlton's face was strong in Shayne. He pulled back on his anger. Losing his temper wasn't going to get him anywhere right now. He had found what he was looking for, and he wasn't going to be distracted now before he had all the answers.

There was a briefcase on Carlton's dressing table, and as Shayne's eyes flicked over to it, he saw the stacks of bills inside it. Carlton had referred to it as two hundred thousand dollars, and Shayne didn't doubt for a second that there was that much there. He said, "Close the case."

"Just what I intended to do," Carlton said. He closed the lid of the case and threw the latch.

Marty Warren was staring at Shayne and the gun, his body taut with

tension. Shayne knew the young man wanted to jump him. But at the same time, he was more worried about Carlton. He had a feeling that the hypnotist was the more dangerous adversary.

"How do I know you're holding Lucy?" he asked. "You're going to have to prove that before we can even start to bargain." He had no intention of bargaining with them, but he wanted some sort of assurance that Lucy was all right.

"I'd love to let you talk to her on the phone, but unfortunately, there's no time for that now. Marty and I must be leaving this place, so you'll just have to take my word for it. Unless you want to chance being responsible for her death."

Shayne wasn't going to let them go, he knew that. He said quickly, "You're the one who hypnotized me and got me to try to kill painter."

"Of course," Carlton admitted. "I gave you that post-hypnotic command and also instructed you to lose consciousness if you failed. It did keep you out of the way all day, didn't it?"

"And you went through my office and cleaned out everything that might tell me what I was working on, didn't you? I wasn't supposed to remember anything after you hypnotized me, but you did that just in case I did."

"And we took your secretary. Surely you can see the logic in that now, Shayne, and realize that I'm not bluffing. The only way you can save her life is to let us go."

SHAYNE HAD KEPT CARLTON TALKING MAINLY AS A STALLING tactic, while he tried to figure out what to do next, but now the conversation was serving another purpose. More snatches of memory were starting to come back to Shayne, brief recollections of what had happened when he came here the night before. He remembered finding out through a phone call that someone named Marty worked at the Magic Grotto as a bartender. Shayne had asked to see him when he got there, and he was sure now that he had talked to Marty Warren. He had even told the young man that his sister was in town and looking for him. But after that, things started to get hazy. Shayne remembered feeling suddenly weak . . .

"Dammit, you drugged my drink!" he snapped at Warren.

Warren ignored Shayne's angry comment and looked at Carlton. "You've got to do something," he said urgently. "If they find out in the office that the money is gone —"

"Shut up!" Carlton hissed, shooting a furious glare at his companion.

Another piece of the puzzle fell into place in Shayne's mind. A bleak

grin slowly stretched across his face. He said, "No wonder the two of you panicked when a private detective turned up here last night asking questions. You were planning to rob your bosses here tonight and then take off for somewhere far away, with new identities probably. Funny thing about crooks in the Mob. They don't like it at all when somebody tries to rip *them* off."

Carlton looked at Shayne, his eyes like hard black marbles now. "All right, Shayne," he said coldly. "You've figured it out. But that changes nothing. I meant what I said — you let us get out of here, or Lucy Hamilton dies."

Shayne took a deep breath and trained the gun on Carlton, lining it up between the man's eyes. "Where is she?" he said, equally as coldly.

The air in the small room was supercharged with tension as the seconds seemed to stretch into hours. It was a standoff, and no one was going to win —

The door behind Shayne opened and the guard from outside said, "Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Carlton, but the guys in the office want to see — Hey!"

Shayne was spinning around. The guard caught sight of the gun in the redhead's fist and instantly went into action. He leaped forward with a snarl, one huge paw batting at the pistol.

Shayne didn't want to shoot him. That would only bring more attention down on their heads. Shayne tried to dodge to the side, but Carlton was moving behind him. The hypnotist snatched up the briefcase and swung it.

The case slammed into the back of Shayne's head and sent him stumbling forward right into the guard's grasp. The man's long arms closed around him, jerking him up tight against the huge body. Shayne felt the air go puffing out of his lungs, and then the roar of the gun filled the room.

He hadn't meant to fire. The hand holding the gun had been trapped between himself and the guard, and his finger on the trigger had been squeezed by the pressure of the bear hug. Intentional or not, the results were the same. The barrel had been pressed into the big man's belly, and now he let out a howl of agony as he released Shayne and staggered backwards.

It was all going to hit the fan now, Shayne knew. He tried to spin back toward Carlton and Warren as he heard their rapid steps behind him. He was too late. Warren had pulled a gun from under his jacket, and he cut at Shayne's head with it viciously. The barrel clipped him on the temple, sending sparks dancing through his brain and opening up a

cut that leaked blood into his eye.

Shayne went to one knee in time for Carlton to kick him in the stomach. The blow sent him sprawling on the floor of the dressing room, next to the now-unconscious guard, who was bleeding heavily from the wound in his stomach.

He could hear the two of them rushing out of the room, and he could also hear startled cries somewhere else in the building. Rolling onto his side, Shayne heaved himself up onto hands and knees, then climbed onto his feet. The briefcase was gone, and so were Carlton and Warren.

**ALL HE NEEDED NOW WAS FOR SOME OF THE CLUB'S** employees to come in and find him with a gun in his hand, next to the gut-shot guard. And there was a good chance that the owners of the club had discovered the theft. That may have been why they sent for Carlton. Shayne knew they wouldn't be in any mood to listen to his story, and even if they did, with two hundred grand missing, they'd never believe that he had stumbled into the whole thing accidentally while looking for a girl's prodigal brother.

He pulled his handkerchief out and mopped as much of the blood as he could off his forehead, then hurried to the door of the dressing room. Peering out into the corridor, he saw that no one had come into view yet. The voices that were coming from the front of the club were getting closer, though. Shayne didn't know what he would find at the other end of the corridor, but that was the only way he could go.

He broke into a run, letting his long legs carry him down the hall as quickly as they could. The corridor made a slight jog, and Shayne spotted an exit door set into one wall. He hurried toward it, hoping that it was unlocked. If it wasn't . . . He tried not to think about that.

A shout went up behind him, and he knew that the guard's body had been found. Shayne didn't look back. A door to one side suddenly popped open, and a man took one step into the hall. He barked, "Hey, what the hell's going on?", then saw Shayne running toward him. Shayne didn't have any idea who the man was, someone connected with the club, he thought, but he knew the man was in his way. The man reached for Shayne.

The gun in Shayne's hand lashed out. He could have shot the man, but he didn't want to do that without being sure of who he was. The gun muzzle did enough damage, slamming into the man's cheekbone and opening a cut much like the one on Shayne's temple. The man fell back against the wall with a moan as Shayne charged on past.

His shoulder hit the exit door. It popped open, and Shayne was

suddenly out in the night, running under the stars. He was at the back of the club, and he headed toward the corner of the building in a near-sprint.

Getting back to the parking lot and making it to his car was his only chance now. There was no sign of Carlton and Warren, and thoughts of Lucy Hamilton and the danger she might be in tried to push into Shayne's head, but he shoved them away. He couldn't do Lucy any good unless he got away from here. He rounded the corner, almost losing his balance, then started toward the front of the club and the parking lot.

The pursuit was behind him, and he hoped that no one had had the presence of mind to cover the front of the club. As he came out of the shadow of the building and ducked through the palm trees surrounding it, he saw several scurrying figures coming out the front doors. But then he heard a sound that made him put on a burst of added speed and sent him into the parking lot well ahead of anyone else.

He heard the squealing of tires from a block or so away . . . .

**CARLTON AND WARREN HADN'T HAD MUCH OF A START ON him.** He would have been willing to bet all the money in that briefcase that the car he had heard leaving was them making their getaway. He spotted the rental car and made for it, calling on every reserve of strength that he had left.

A bullet sang through the air next to his head.

People were yelling for him to stop. Shayne reached the car, jamming the key into the door lock and yanking it open. He spun and brought up his pistol, triggering off three quick shots over the heads of the people running after him. They all dove for cover, and that brief delay gave Shayne the chance he needed to pile into the car, get it started, and take off with a slewing of tires and a spurting of gravel.

Shooting out through the big front gate, Shayne jerked his head from side to side. It was getting fairly late now, and traffic was light. Light enough for him to pick up a rapidly dwindling pair of tail lights several blocks away. Shayne's foot came down on the accelerator, and the car rocketed out onto the street, going the same direction as the other vehicle.

Shayne put the gun down on the seat beside him and grasped the wheel with both hands as he pressed the gas pedal to the floor. He blew the horn as he approached intersections, and stop signs and red lights flickered past almost without notice. It would have been nice to have the Buick, with its powerful engine, and the rental car didn't respond quite as well as Shayne was used to, but there was nothing he

could do about that. He kept his eyes glued to the car he was pursuing, and slowly, the distance between them narrowed.

Of course, he had no way of knowing for sure that he was chasing the right vehicle. But if he wasn't, then he had lost Carlton and Warren and any chance he might have of locating Lucy, so he refused to consider the possibility for very long.

The next quarter-hour was a nightmare of high speed, skidding turns and near-miss collisions. The chase taxed Shayne's driving ability to the maximum, and several times his heart had started to sink when it looked like he had lost his quarry. Then he would spot them again and pour on still more speed.

They had to be aware that someone was chasing them, but they wouldn't know for sure if it was Shayne or their former employers. Shayne had tried to watch the rearview mirror for any sign of someone else behind him, but so far, he had seen no one trying to catch up to him. The departure from the Magic Grotto had been so fast and so hectic, it looked like they had all gotten away from there with no further pursuit.

IT CAME ALMOST AS A SURPRISE TO SHAYNE WHEN HE realized that the car up ahead had stopped. The lights cut off suddenly. Shayne hit the brakes, not wanting to overshoot it, even though they had still been a couple of blocks ahead of him when they stopped. His tires squealed on the pavement as the car started to slow down.

The car at the curb came into range of his lights. Shayne rode the brakes harder, and the rear end of his car started to fishtail slightly. Then he saw a flash from the other vehicle, and the windshield of his car starred and splintered as a bullet punched through it.

He whipped the wheel to the left, letting the rear end go. It skewed around, bringing the car broadside in the street as it screeched to a stop. Another slug hit a rear window this time, shattering it and sending slivers of glass cascading over the interior of the car. Shayne grabbed the gun from the seat and hit the door, rolling out and dropping behind the protection of the car's body.

He popped up long enough to send a shot toward the other car. He hadn't been wrong; it was definitely Carlton and Warren, or they wouldn't be shooting at him. There seemed to be only one gun firing at him, and he wondered where the other man was.

They were in a street that ran alongside an older apartment building, and as Shayne risked a glance past the rear fender and fired again, he saw Carlton and a woman running out of the building. Carlton had hold of her hand and was almost dragging her along. Shayne thought for an

instant that it was Lucy, but then he saw the waist-length hair streaming out behind her and knew it had to be someone else. A wife or girl-friend, perhaps, and almost certainly the other person who had been in on the plan with Carlton and Warren. That meant Lucy could still be somewhere in that building . . .

Shayne saw another muzzle flash and knew that Warren had to be crouched behind the other car, using it for cover, too. Carlton opened the rear door of the car and all but threw the girl inside, then yelled, "Come on, Marty!" Warren snapped off two more shots in Shayne's direction, then started to run around the front of the car toward the driver's door.

Shayne heard the slugs whine off into the night, then he was rolling out into the street for a clear shot. He fired from the prone position, left hand clasping right wrist for support, and the crack of the shots split the night.

The bullets thudded into Marty Warren's chest and flung him backwards. He bounced off the fender of the car and crumpled slowly to the street.

"Marty!"

The scream came from the girl, who burst out of the car and ran to Warren, dropping beside him and throwing her arms around his limp body. Shayne was on his feet again now, charging toward the other car. He saw Carlton standing behind it, and his finger was just starting to tighten on the trigger when the hypnotist flung his arms in the air and cried, "Don't shoot! My God, don't shoot!"

Shayne stopped, keeping the gun trained on Carlton. He knew there was little chance of danger from the sobbing girl. She was too concerned about Warren to worry about anything else. Shayne grated, "Come out from behind there, Carlton."

Carlton did as he was told, keeping his arms up and his hands in plain sight. His urbane face was now a study in fear. He said shakily, "There's two hundred thousand dollars in the car, Shayne. Let me get out of here, and it's yours."

Shayne ignored the offer. He said, "Where's my secretary?"

Carlton jerked his head toward the building behind him. "In there, Apartment 324. She's all right, Shayne, I promise you. We had to drug her and tie her up, but she's not hurt."

There was a cold fire of anger burning in Shayne. These men had kidnapped Lucy, had tried to get him to kill Peter Painter, had done their best to kill the sister of one of them . . . all because they were planning to rob some even bigger criminals and didn't want anything happening that might draw attention to them.

"What about it, Shayne?" Carlton asked. "The money in exchange for a head start. Do we have a deal?"

Shayne could hear sirens in the night and knew that the firefight in the middle of the street would bring the cops on the run. He said quietly, "I've got a deal for you, Carlton. You can stay right here and make a full confession to the cops when they get here, including hypnotizing me into trying to kill Painter, or you can walk. You can just take off. I won't tell the cops a thing."

Carlton's tongue licked over his lips nervously. "You don't mean that."

"Yes, I do. I won't tell the cops. But I will make sure that word gets to the proper people that you masterminded the robbery at the Magic Grotto tonight."

Even in the dim illumination of a nearby streetlight, Shayne could see Carlton pale. "You can't do that. Without the money, I'd never have a chance to get away from them."

Shayne's broad shoulders lifted in a shrug. "Your choice. If I was you, I'd take my chances with the cops, though."

Carlton's head jerked from side to side as he looked for some way, any way, out.

And then it dropped, as the full realization sank in on him.

There was no way out for him. Mike Shayne had seen to that.

Far down the street, flashing red and blue lights came into view.

A HALF HOUR LATER, SHAYNE WAS STILL STANDING IN THE street, but now Lucy Hamilton, unharmed as Carlton had said, was beside him, looking wan and tired. His arm was around her, and her head rested on his shoulder. Shayne would have felt pretty good except for the stinging of the cut on his head that the police medics had bandaged and the finger that Peter Painter was shaking in his face.

"I don't care what that two-bit magician says," Painter was almost shouting. "You tried to kill me, Shayne, and you're going to pay for it."

Shayne shrugged. "You can try to make a case if you want, Petey, but with Carlton's admission that he hypnotized me, do you really think you could make it stick?"

The street was full of police cars, ambulances, uniformed officers, and curious bystanders. Carlton had made a full confession and then been taken away. Painter had arrived, along with Terry Denton, in time to hear most of Carlton's story. Marty Warren had been taken to the hospital in serious condition, but he was expected to survive. Shayne didn't know if that was a good thing for Kelly and her parents

or not. He had already checked with the hospital in Miami and been told that Kelly was in good condition.

Painter was bouncing up and down on his built-up shoes, his anger animating him and turning his face red. The frustration of having Shayne in the palm of his hand, of being ready to bring attempted murder charges against the big detective, only to have the whole case explode in his face, was just too much for the dapper little chief.

"I swear, Shayne, sooner or later you'll slip up," Painter snarled. "And when you do, by God, I'm going to hang you!"

Shayne just smiled and shook his head.

Painter spun around on Terry, looking for some kind of support. "Did you ever hear such a ridiculous story?" he demanded. "Hypnosis, indeed! What a bunch of garbage! Do you really expect me to believe that you didn't know exactly what you were doing when you shot at me, Shayne?" He turned back toward Shayne. "Shayne!"

Michael Shayne was walking away wearily, his arm around Lucy.

That left it for Terry Denton to answer Painter's question. She smiled sweetly and said, "I guess you'll never really know, will you, Chief?"

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*A clipped voice came from behind me. "Please stand perfectly still. I have a large-caliber revolver aimed directly at your kidneys." He cocked the hammer, as though to prove it.*

# The Wraith and the Dove

by MIKE TAYLOR

*NOTE: The events related in "Death of a Pulpster" (MSMM, Oct 80) and the story which follows are extracted from a journal found among the personal effects of my late uncle, William Lawrence Bryant. Irregularly kept, it is an account of his days in New York, from 1935 to 1942, while he wrote for the pulp markets. He was drafted into the Army in May of 1942 and mortally wounded during the North African campaign a year later. The journal lay forgotten for thirty-five years amidst the contents of an old footlocker in a great aunt's attic. Since its discovery I've attempted to track down his stories in the crumbling pages of the old magazines. It is both a fascinating and frustrating task. The pulps were at their gaudy peak during that period, with more than two hundred titles on the stands every month. Pitifully few of them remain today. The later stories I have managed to locate evidence a growing sophistication of style and subject. It seems likely that, had William Bryant survived the war, he would have moved into mainstream writing as the pulps went into their rapid decline. Perhaps these few excerpts will serve as a memorial of sorts — to him and to all the others, long dead and mostly forgotten, who provided the fiction for a generation.*



I WAS RUNNING FOR MY LIFE, PURSUED BY A SWARM OF giant wasps. The insects' angry, insistent whine gradually merged into the familiar grate of the doorbell, dragging me up from the black cocoon of sleep. How's that for imagery?

I thrashed away the covers and peered at the bedside clock. 10:30. Dust motes roiled up a dim shaft of sunlight. I threw on my robe and stalked to the door. The threadbare rug was cold and tickled my bare feet.

I had been up most of the night, pounding out the final draft of a novelette due at *Dime Detective* that afternoon. I work well at night, especially against deadlines. Alone, without distractions, the words flow smoothly off the cantankerous old Underwood. I can do 500 words an hour on a good night.

The man at the door was a stranger: short and broad-shouldered, pomaded black hair, sharp, watchful eyes that flicked beyond me to take in the entire room in a glance. He was wearing a rumpled brown tweed and cradled a new Fedora in his right hand. Even before he flashed a shield, I knew. One of New York's finest.

"William Bryant? I'm Lieutenant Horace Rheinfeld. 9th Precinct Homicide. Can I come in?"

What the hell? I kicked my brain into gear as I shut the door behind him. I've read — and written — enough detective stuff to know astonished innocence doesn't get you anywhere. So I just said:

"How about some coffee, Lieutenant? I didn't get to bed until after four. I'm afraid I'm a bit groggy."

"Sure thing." He sat tight until I had the coffee perking on the hotplate, then he pulled a magazine from an inside pocket and flashed the cover at me. "You know this?"

I knew it well; in fact, several copies were scattered around the apartment. The shadowy four-color cover depicted a frightened villain cowering back from a sinister, black-cowled figure, shrouded in glistening silver-white. "Hordes of the Beast — Full length \$2.00 Novel," the cover raved in blood-red slashes. It was issue #3 of *The Wraith*, latest in the growing line of magazines devoted to exotic pulp heroes, poor kin to *The Shadow*, *Doc Savage*, and *The Spider*.

"G. Clinton Dunbar," Lieutenant Rheinfeld said doubtfully. "I called the publisher this morning. They said that was you."

"Guilty," I admitted. "It's a house name but, yes, I'm responsible for *The Wraith*."

"He's not real, right?"

"Huh?"

"This guy in the silver shroud who tears around shooting up crooks — he's just what they call a fictional character?"

I grinned. "Of course. Anybody who ran around dressed like that would end up in the booby hatch. Popular Publications wanted a gimmick to give *The Shadow* some competition. One of their editors,

Rogers Terrill, gave me a shot. I dreamed up The Wraith and right now he's helping pay the rent. Why?"

"Well, last night your fictional character killed somebody. A guy named Sheldon Rice. Another writer."

I blinked at him. "Wait a minute! You're telling me that somebody dressed up like The Wraith killed Sheldon Rice — the man who does Redscar for Street and Smith?" Comprehension dawned. "Am I a suspect?"

"He's your creation." Rheinfeld sighed. "Actually, there's more to it than that. Rice is the *second* writer who's been scotched in the past two weeks. The first was a fellow named Durkee. Winslow Durkee. Both died the same way."

I felt dizzy as I poured coffee into my matched set of handleless cups. "How?"

"Garroted. A nasty way to go. Witnesses to the first murder described someone in a bizarre get-up. Last night Rice's wife heard a commotion downstairs and got there in time to see this guy in a silver cape bending over her husband's body. Being somewhat familiar with the field, she recognized the outfit. You know anything about the other one, Durkee?"

"I've heard of him. Another pulpster. Did a lot of western and historical stuff. He wasn't a member of the Fiction Guild. I knew Sheldon Rice though. Big jolly fellow, bald as an eagle. His Redscar is one of the better costumed heroes around. Damn!"

He sipped noisily at the hot coffee and scratched his ear. "Look, you seem fairly bright — too smart to bump off somebody while you're wearing a nut costume, leastwise your own man's. A motive is what I need — like why would anybody want to wire two writers? Can you help me there?"

I thought about it, not very successfully. Self-preservation kept intruding into my mental processes. "I can't think of anything right now. Do you know a Detective Sergeant Harmon? Works homicide out of the 12th Precinct. Well, he's my character reference. I helped him out on the Emil Curtain case last year."

He pulled out a small black notebook and copied into it. "I know Harmon. He's a good man. Okay, I won't take anymore of your time right now. I'd appreciate it if you'd think on what I said about a motive — and why somebody would dress up like it's Halloween to kill. Here's my number."

I couldn't help myself. As he got up to leave I said, "By the way, did you read the story? To look for clues or anything?"

He folded the magazine and stuffed it back into his pocket. "Yeah."

"Find any?"

"No."

"How did you like it?"

"Trash."

A man of few words, the lieutenant.

GOING BACK TO SLEEP WAS IMPOSSIBLE, SO I GOT DRESSED and made some lunch. A nebula of questions whirled through my head. Foremost: what had caused the murders of two fellow writers and what was the connection? Followed closely by: who was the killer? And in the last but not least department: why in the world was he costumed like my character, The Wraith?

I paced and puzzled and drank coffee and worried and smoked Fatimas that tasted like camel dung, even through a holder. I didn't think Lieutenant Rheinfeld really suspected me of murder, but he certainly had to follow up on the connection. I figured I had impressed him as being fairly normal (for a writer), not the type to don silver duds and go rushing around strangling people. It would have been interesting if the killer had worn a Spider outfit and the lieutenant had wound up questioning Norvell Page. I wondered what he would have made of that flamboyant, flame-bearded gentleman with his penchant for wild costumes.

I missed my favorite sounding board, Walt Morrell. His mother had passed away the previous week and he had taken the Limited back to Chicago. Walt and I were companions in many struggles and, eventually, some successes as we endeavored to crack the pulp market.

I'm the sort of person who doesn't think well alone. Ideas must be verbalized, tossed around, attacked from various angles and viewpoints before they take on life for me. Most of my stories are written in this mode, hashed out in late night discussions until they seem more like recollections of actual events than wild-eyed fabrications.

The room became so filled with smoke I cracked the lone window. I had forgotten it was Springtime outside. A warm breeze rushed in, ruffling the jumble of papers piled on the battered table which served as a desk. As I stacked magazines strategically to keep everything from blowing away, a letter caught my eye. Suddenly I knew who I wanted to talk to.

E.A. Wainwright was a Long Island writer who had sent me a lengthy letter commenting on the first Wraith story. It was thoughtful and politely critical, moreso than my hackwork deserved. I was so impressed I dug up a few Wainwright stories, read them, found very little to be critical of, and ended up writing a reply praising his work.

We had exchanged three letters since and I found him to be a very discerning writer. Most of his stuff appeared in the quality publications: *Black Mask*, *Ranch Romances*, *Blue Book*, etc. That analytical mind would be just the ticket off which to bounce my tangled thoughts.

I dressed quickly, slipped the *Dime Detective* manuscript into a folder, and rode the open cage elevator down to the lobby. The day was as perfect as the breeze had promised, sunny, warm, almost summery. I wondered if the Giants were playing at the Polo Grounds.

The offices of Popular Publications took up the entire twentieth floor of the Bartholomew Building on East 42nd Street. I dropped the story off with Ken White and used his telephone directory. There was no Wainwright in the Long Island listings. Not surprising, considering the remoteness of some of the towns. I wasn't really dismayed. It was a great day for a ride.

**THE STREETCAR TOOK ABOUT FORTY-FIVE MINUTES. I GOT** off at the last stop on the line, about ten blocks from where I was headed. This far out the landscape was almost rural. #7 Millbrook Road was a two-story white colonial on a half-acre of well kept lawn, set between two tree-filled vacant lots. E.A. Wainwright was apparently prospering.

A large somnolent Collie eyed me incuriously as I mounted the long porch and rang the bell. The door was opened by a tall young woman wearing tan jodhpurs and a white silk blouse. Her fine face was framed by wings of dark brown hair. The eyes were large, gray, and very expressive. Who was I, they asked, and what did I want?

"Bill Bryant," I said, yanking my hat off. "I'm looking for Mr. Wainwright, the writer?"

"William Lawrence Bryant? Dan Dolan and The Wraith? Come in!" She grinned. "Mr. Bryant, I'm E.A. Wainwright. Elizabeth Ann."

Well, I'd read enough hackneyed stories where it happens, even written a few. You know, the guy who's positive he's dealing with a man until they finally meet and — pow! — it turns out to be a lovely young lady. I was nonetheless dumbfounded as I followed her into the large, brightly furnished parlor.

Put quickly at ease by our exchange of letters, we talked enthusiastically of writing for awhile, successes and failures, plans for the future. I was fascinated. She had moved into an area dominated by men, competed with them, and carved out a niche in the most uncertain of professions. In many circles writing for the pulps was not considered a ladylike pursuit — hence the use of initials to confound any resistance to a woman writer of adventure stories.

Finally, when the initial rush of conversation had died down, it occurred to her to ask why I was there. Briefly I recounted what I knew about the two bizarre murders.

"Like it or not, I'm involved. I had to talk to someone. Our opinions seemed to complement one another so well on paper; I thought you might help me think this through."

Her eyes flashed with interest. "How strange! Could it be someone with a grudge against you?"

"I've considered that. I suppose I've made a few enemies; who hasn't? That could explain the selection of costume but it doesn't help much with the motive. I can't conceive of anyone being killed just to frame me."

"It's certain the killer was dressed as The Wraith for the first murder?"

"Lieutenant Rhéinfeld seemed to think so. And garroting isn't all that common a way to kill. The question is: was he wearing that outfit just in case there were witnesses or was he trying to advertise?"

Elizabeth looked thoughtful. "The same thread runs through all this — the costumed hero. Durkee and Rice both created exotic crime-fighters; they were murdered by someone masquerading as your character; now you've come to me. It's uncanny!"

"Hold it! I knew Rice had Redscar going. What about Durkee? And you?"

She dimpled. "Surely you've heard of The Dove. My gray-cloaked acrobat in *Detective Fiction Weekly*. As for Durkee, why he was churning out the Captain Dark series for Standard."

"*You're* Eric Wright. I thought the style was familiar. I paused. "This gets weirder and weirder. What's the connection? Coincidence between you and me, sure, but as for the rest . . ."

**WE WERE INTERRUPTED BY THE ENTRANCE OF A TALL OLDER man, almost military in his bearing. Snow-white hair and mustache contrasted perfectly with a ruddy complexion. His eyes were clear and as blue as glacial ice.**

"Uncle Raoul!" Elizabeth jumped up. "I'd like you to meet a friend of mine. William Bryant, my uncle, Raoul Todd. He was my inspiration for getting into the writing game."

"An honor, sir," I said, clasping the powerful, weathered hand. I wasn't kidding. Raoul Todd was one of the pioneers of pulp fiction. He had begun selling just after the turn of the century and, except for a period of distinguished service in the Great War, had been a mainstay of the Munsey chain ever since. He was totally versatile, turning out

whatever the occasion called for. Both his rates and his penchant for spending them were legendary.

"Mr. Bryant. Elizabeth has spoken of you." His voice was clipped, New England precise. "I understand you too are a member of our profession. I regret I haven't had the opportunity to read any of your work."

"I have yours," I said. "Your range is phenomenal."

And off we went. I won't bore you with the three-way interchange of writer's chatter that followed. It turned out that Todd was Elizabeth's guardian, her parents having been killed in a Tri-motor crash over Lake Erie three years before. He was a gifted conversationalist and the time went swiftly. Eventually I touched upon what had brought me there.

"Shocking. Simply shocking." He shook his head. "I knew Winslow Durkee slightly. A bit pompous but a fine writer."

He must have read my mind because soon after he arose and said, "Well, I have some things to attend to. I'll leave you children alone." Bless his soul!

Elizabeth and I talked of inconsequentials for awhile, then I summoned up my courage and asked, "Do you get into the city often?"

"Once a week or so; I have a weakness for foreign restaurants. I don't visit my editors, of course; can't give away the big secret."

"I hope this isn't too forward, but would you have lunch with me tomorrow? Maybe we can come up with some ideas. I resent this clumsy attempt to frame me, besides which, I certainly don't want to see any more murders committed."

She agreed readily to my transparent reasoning and fetched my hat. I left soon afterward, whistling like an idiot all the way back to the station.

I HAD ARRANGED TO MEET ELIZABETH AT THE LITTLE GREEK restaurant near the park. It was another mild April day so I walked the entire distance, mind afire with everything that had transpired the previous evening.

I had returned to the apartment to find a note under the door. It was from Arthur Burks, president of the Fiction Guild, asking me to attend a meeting of its officers that same evening at the Biltmore Hotel. Stated purpose: to discuss the recent murders and their impact on the writing community. Implied purpose: to determine the exact extent of my involvement in the affair. Apparently the police had been asking around.

I went, both out of curiosity and self-defense. The meeting was held in the basement "convention room," in reality a blind pig. Although

the 18th Amendment had been repealed over two years ago, the traffic in illegal booze did not dry up overnight. The big-time bootleggers had a sophisticated distribution system established and a large investment in quality Canadian stock to dispose of. There was also an added incentive for the customer — circumvention of the new federal tax on alcoholic beverages.

There were twelve men present not including myself — all high muckety-mucks in the Guild. I immediately thought of a jury. Our president, Mr. Burks, wore a somber black suit which matched his looks. Norvell Page was resplendent in white dinner-wear and a scarlet cape. The rest, among them Ted Tinsley, George Bruce, and Harry Drago, were more conservative in appearance.

We did the social niceties routine, then George Worts got down to business.

"Look, Bill, we didn't call this meeting to give you more grief; we'd like to help if possible. But, frankly, the identification of The Wraith with these murders has everyone upset. The story made the evening editions. It's going to bring us some nasty publicity. You know some of the decency groups have been trying to get pulps banned from the newsstands for years. This is just the kind of ammunition they need."

His little speech rubbed me wrong. "You talk like I created The Wraith just so some nut could dress up and kill people," I said angrily. "Well, here's a bulletin for you. There's more than just your livelihood at stake. Somebody's wiping out your fellow writers in a rather hideous fashion. Instead of worrying about public reaction, maybe we should be thinking about ways to stop this guy before he does it again."

"Point well taken," Mort Weisinger said. "I agree we should do everything we can to put this jerk on ice. Anybody have any ideas?"

There was considerable foot-shuffling and drink-gulping and staring at the floor. No ideas.

I got hotter. "For people who make their living with their imagination you sure aren't showing much now. Isn't it fairly obvious to everyone that the killer is probably a writer? The motive has me stumped, but everything else, including the taking on of a fictional identity, points to one of our own."

"More likely an editor," someone snickered.

Well, things got rather acrimonious during the next few minutes. I was hostile, they were nervous and a little afraid; my remarks had everyone looking at the person at his elbow a trifle uneasily. But Arthur Burks finally summed up and, back to the analogy of a jury, it was my sentence.

"While we sympathise with your position, Bill, the fact remains that

the publicity could be dynamite. In view of this, I have no choice but to ask Popular to suspend *The Wraith* for a few months until the murders are solved and the scandal blows over. I'll certainly ask them to consider other assignments for you."

"Phooey," I said; or something along those lines. "You've just given my character a death sentence. If *The Wraith* leaves the stands now, it'll never come back."

They all shrugged apologetically, patted my shoulder, shook my hand, and gradually filed out. I was so mad I had another glass or three of that good Canadian blend to douse the flames.

Leaving none too steadily, I picked up my hat from the girl at the door. As I started to put it on, I noticed something white protruding slightly from the inner band. It was a small piece of paper which, unfolded, said simply, "*She's next!*"

**ELIZABETH WAS WAITING FOR ME, LOOKING SPRINGTIME** bright in a pale green suit. I was so relieved to see her I grabbed her hand and squeezed until she winced.

"I'm sorry. I've had a bad night worrying about you. You did get my note?"

She smiled. "Indeed I did. Very mysterious. A cab arriving at that late hour bearing such a cryptic message. 'Be careful. You are in danger. Stay inside and make certain your uncle is close by.' Well, I've done as you asked. Uncle Raoul escorted me here and will be back to pick me up in —" she consulted a tiny gold watch "— 97 minutes. Explanations, please."

"Let's order first." We did. Lamb stew, salad, and a house wine. While we were waiting I showed her the piece of paper. Her color fled and she had to take one of my cigarettes to regain her composure.

"But this means . . ."

"I know," I said. "The implications are incredible. The writer knows you are a woman. Somehow, he knows of our acquaintance. And, strangest of all, he's forewarning us; he wants us to know — and fear — what is being threatened." Briefly I explained how I had found it. "Difficult as it is for me to believe, one of those men at the meeting must be the murderer."

"But they're all respected members of the writing community. How could it be?"

"I don't know." I rubbed my eyes. "But we have to figure out which one it is. Quickly."

"Hoax?"

"Possibly. Now that the word is out, there's no telling. But that's

Lieutenant Rheinfeld's problem."

"No, Bill. No police. Not yet."

I stared at her. "Elizabeth, we're talking about murder."

"If we call them in too soon, it will chase this nut away. I'm scared now, but I don't want to be looking over my shoulder forever. I want it finished. Let's you and I try to figure this out."

"He could be counting on that. The intent of the note might just be to get us together. Maybe he wants both of us."

She shrugged, chin set. Willful woman.

"Alright. You said yesterday your identity was a secret in publishing circles. From everyone?"

"Just about. Well, there is Fanny Ellsworth, the editor of *Ranch Romances*. We've met several times, but she agreed to keep my secret."

"But she could have leaked it out. Inadvertently, perhaps, or to someone she trusted."

"I suppose. Even Uncle Raoul could have let it slip. He likes his sherry and he does get rather talky when he drinks."

"Swell. That doesn't help much."

Lunch came. It was delicious, but neither of us was especially hungry. I felt strangely detached, as if this were all some silly melodrama being played to an inevitable conclusion. I was afraid for Elizabeth's sake, yet I realized there was sense in what she said. We were being taunted, threatened with grim intent. Without a definite lead the police could do little more than postpone things, or perhaps draw another unprepared victim into the deadly game.

The time went all too fast. We spent the rest of it on subjects more pleasant, learning one another's likes and dislikes, sharing in that best of all possible times: the discovery of a kindred spirit. Most of all we talked writing, writing, writing; skirting the ominous shadow that was intruding into our profession.

When Raoul Todd drew up in a cab outside we arose and I took her hands. "Don't stay alone for a moment. Be very careful."

"I will." She leaned forward and brushed my lips with hers. "You too, Bill. I want to get to know you better. Bye."

"I'll be in touch the minute I learn anything," I said, and she was gone.

ON MY WAY HOME I STOPPED AT A PHONE BOOTH AND INVESTED a nickel in Lieutenant Rheinfeld's number. A disembodied voice thought he had just come in. Could I hold a minute?

I could. Five minutes actually before he came on the line. "This is

Bill Bryant. About The Wraith murders? Listen, I have a question. Did either of the victims receive a threatening note before he died?"

He answered slowly. "Not that we know of. Did you?"

"No." Technically that was true. The threat hadn't been against me. "I was just wondering."

"Well, as far as we can tell they had no warning." Pause. "You're not holding out on me?"

"I'll let you know if I hear anything," I said, and hung up quickly before he could press me. I'm a poor liar.

Back at the flat I put my feet up and engaged in some serious smoking and thinking. This looked, as Holmes would say, like a three-pipe problem. Events of the past two days paraded through my head like a train rushing past a crossing. Murder, suspicions, threats, blooming romance — it would have made a hell of a story.

Several dozen things concerned me, all revolving around why and how I had been drawn into this mess. But what bothered me most was the note — how had the writer learned of the connection between Elizabeth and me? The logical explanation was that it was someone who had been in my rooms and noticed the correspondence on the table. That could be any of a large number of people. I tried to match them against those who had been at the Biltmore and came up with three or four possibles. Fine so far, but then how did he know E.A. Wainwright was a woman? Got you there, Watson!

The strongest candidate, I finally decided, was a writer turned agent name of Will Porath. Will was an inveterate nib-nose. He knew more than was decent about everyone in the writing game because he dealt with both authors and editors. If anyone was likely to share in the twin secrets of Elizabeth's identity and our acquaintance, he was a fair bet. I recalled that he and Fanny Ellsworth were reputed to be close friends. Hmm. I dug out an old Guild bulletin and found his address.

IT WAS FULL DARK BY THE TIME I MADE IT TO PORATH'S 59TH Street digs. An outside entrance led down to his basement living quarters. I sidled down ten narrow steps and knocked. No answer. I stepped back and checked where the door met the frame. No light was visible.

It took less than ten minutes to overcome the old latchlock and gain entrance to his rooms. A part of me realized I was acting irrationally, that operating outside the law was both stupid and dangerous. I couldn't help it. It was like being caught up in one of my own stories. The hero always won, didn't he?

I turned on the lights, locked the door behind me, and looked

around. There wasn't much space, two small rooms and a bath, even more cramped than my own. Porath did have a genuine desk, which temporarily aroused my envy. Alongside it was a four-drawer metal filing cabinet. Unlocked. I went to work on that.

The top two drawers were empty except for a bottle of Four Roses. The bottom two held about fifty folders on various writers, arranged alphabetically. I flipped through them, looking for names I knew. Contents were basically the same. Check receipts, letters to and from editors and writers, manuscripts in between submissions. The most interesting item was a single page of biographical data on each writer. It contained, in addition to the usual facts and figures you might expect, a lot of penciled-in notations that had little to do with the business. Pseudonyms, credit status, past arrests, sexual preferences and whom they involved — I wondered if Will Porath wasn't doubling in blackmail. Or murder.

Neither dead man was represented by a file. Destroyed? Or was I jumping to conclusions? I checked the E.A. Wainwright folder. Sure enough, Elizabeth's full name was on the sheet. Mine was not. Very little else, except that Raoul Todd was her uncle.

On impulse I opened his file. There were half a dozen unsold manuscripts and twice as many rejection slips. The biographical sheet was full, and clipped to it were I.O.U.s amounting to over \$600. I read rapidly, the phrases seeming to tumble off the page. "Hopeless case of writer's block . . . hasn't sold in nearly a year . . . \$8000 in debt . . . seems almost deranged with frustration . . ." The last note on the page had been scribbled hurriedly. "*Could Todd be The Wraith killer?*"

Everything seemed to stop. Was it possible? Suddenly a lot of things clicked into place. Who better to know about Elizabeth and me than her uncle? And the note, which I assumed had come from the Biltmore, could just as easily have been slipped into my hat that afternoon at the house. I was too euphoric to have noticed. And if all this was true — Good God!

Outside, it had started to rain, a cold driving downpour. It was nearly nine o'clock before I found a cabbie willing to take the haul out to Long Island. I promised him an extra five if he broke some speed laws, but the weather was so rotten it didn't help much.

WE GOT THERE AT A QUARTER PAST TEN. THE HOUSE WAS dark. I paid the fare and headed up the walk, my heart as heavy as a chunk of anthracite. The cab's lights swept over me as it left, chasing a parade of shadows across the lawn and hedges.

As I stepped up onto the porch I thought I saw a gleam of light from

somewhere deep inside the house. I leaned on the doorbell and waited, making a puddle on the floor. For the second time that night there was no answer.

Kicking the door had no effect other than wrenching my knee painfully on the third try. In frustration I grabbed the handle and twisted savagely. The door opened easily. It wasn't locked.

I hesitated, went inside, through the parlor and down a short hall to the living room, following the faint source of light. It came from a single flickering kerosene lamp atop a marble end table. There was a roomful of heavy wooden furniture, chairs and divans crouching like predatory beasts in the moving shadows.

Elizabeth sat in one of the chairs, eyes staring and face pale as I barged in.

"You've got to get out of here!" I cried. "Your uncle may be the murderer —"

I stopped because, as I drew nearer, I saw that she was bound to the chair.

"Welcome, Mr. Bryant," came that clipped voice from behind me. "Please stand perfectly still. I have a large-caliber revolver aimed directly at your kidneys." He cocked the hammer, I guess to prove his point.

"It's no good, Todd," I said as I felt him come up behind me. "The police know you're The Wraith killer. Why not surrender?" Great dialogue.

"I think not. Elizabeth has told me of your decision not to involve the police until you had proof positive. I had a premonition that you would turn up here tonight. Our hero to the rescue. Kindly sit in that chair next to my niece."

I did, moving slowly so as not to upset him. Although he spoke calmly there was a nasty undercurrent to his voice, a hint of the madness that lurked within.

"Hands behind the chair," he ordered. A loop of cord was slipped quickly over my wrists and yanked tight.

"What I don't understand," I said as he proceeded to rope me to the chair, "is why. Why are you killing these innocent people? I know you're in debt but how can this help?"

"Innocent!" he snorted. "The talentless hacks are stealing my livelihood. I admit I've been in a bit of a creative drought. It happens to all great writers. But then I came up with this marvelous new character — The Raven. I took my stories to all the editors, and do you know what they told me — the market is saturated. There is a glut of these infantile, carbon copy crimefighters, including your own abysmal creature

and that birdbrain of my niece's. No room for Raoul Todd, the foremost pulpster of the century." He chuckled slyly. "So I decided to eliminate the competition."

Elizabeth said quietly, "Uncle Raoul, you're crazy."

"Not entirely," I said, my brain beginning to churn. "I think the killings have two purposes. One may be, as he says, to open up the market. But the other is to divert attention when it's time for his primary target — you."

"Very clever, Mr. Bryant," he laughed. "Do rave on."

"It's simple. Although you're her guardian, Elizabeth must have control of the property and money. If she dies some or all of it goes to you. It would be too obvious if she were killed outright. Some people know you have money trouble. This way it appears she's just another in a series of attacks by The Wraith killer. By the way, why did you chose my hero?"

"Such a memorable costume. I wanted no nondescript murderer. I was quite surprised to find you knew my niece . . . Well, this has been most entertaining but we must move along. The purpose of my little warning note, of course, was to insure that sooner or later you would make an appearance. What more fitting conclusion than The Wraith and his last victim dying together?"

HE CAME AROUND THE CHAIR AND I SAW HIM FOR THE FIRST time. He wore a neat black suit and a bow tie. The gun made a bulge in his side pocket. Reality came flooding in. It was ego-satisfying to make these clever, albeit late, deductions, but this fruitcake was going to kill us. I lunged at my bonds and only succeeded in further numbing my hands.

Todd picked up the lamp and walked over to the far wall, where a sheaf of heavy drapes stretched from floor to ceiling. Setting the lamp at their base, he removed the chimney. A tongue of orange flame licked along the edge of the fabric. Soon the whole thing was blazing.

He returned to us, hooded eyes fanatical in the gloom. A piece of cord dangled from his right hand. It was about two feet long with a knot at each end. The fire leaped up brighter in the background.

"Alas, my dear, for the sake of appearances you too must meet the garrote. I assure you it will be less painful than you might believe. I have become quite proficient in its use." He moved toward Elizabeth.

"Todd!" I roared. "You crazy bastard! Let her alone. Who's going to believe I strangled her with my hands tied?"

He gave me a shivery smile. "The fire will take care of your bonds; this, however, has a fine wire inside of it." He stepped behind Elizabeth and looped the cord around her throat.

I went a little crazy myself, surging wildly against the ropes, jerking the heavy chair around. Todd crossed his hands and drew the cord up tight against the white column of her neck.

The fire suddenly aproduted a dozen tendrils and smoke billowed into the room. There was a sharp tug at the ropes binding my wrists. My hands came loose but I was still held by the strands around my mid-section.

I knew I was too late — but Todd and Elizabeth were both frozen, staring at something behind me. I worked frantically to get free. The heavy smoke stung my eyes and rasped in my throat.

The last of the ropes fell away and I was on Todd, twisting his thin wrists until he dropped the cord, striking a chopping blow to his face that sent him reeling to the floor.

I attacked the knots on Elizabeth's bonds as the smoke roiled thicker and a blast of heat reached us. "Hurry, Bill!" she choked. "It's moving towards the doorway."

It seemed forever before the stubborn coils began to give. I picked them apart with bloody fingers, unwrapped the ropes, and swept her into my arms. The carpet crackled under my feet as I raced for the door. I got there ahead of the flames, barely.

"Uncle Raoul!" Elizabeth cried.

I set her down in the hall and turned back. Todd had struggled to his knees. Standing over him, dimly visible through the pall of smoke, was a tall figure in a silver cape and black cowl. It looked almost like Todd was being garroted.

Then the ceiling fell in.

ALL THAT WAS MORE THAN THREE MONTHS AGO. IT'S JULY now, and the city is wrapped in muggy summer heat. The latest issue of *The Wraith* is due out on the stands tomorrow. Contrary to those Guild members' predictions, publicity generated by the crimes actually increased sales of the magazine. Starting in August, publication will be monthly.

Elizabeth has taken a cottage on the Sound for the summer. She's over her nightmares now and back to writing on a fulltime schedule. I see her every weekend. We're thinking about trying a collaboration soon.

As for me, I'm fine — my burns have all healed and I can stand to look at an open flame again. My writing is more prolific than ever. In fact, only one thing keeps from being a totally happy ending. They found Todd's body — *only Todd's body* — in the ruins the day after the fire.

So who was that in the silver cape?

*When teatime came and went with no word from her husband, Maura Kelly began to worry. It wasn't like Seamus to be out this late. Something dreadful must have happened to him!*

# Murder in Dublin

by JEAN DARLING

SEAMUS KELLY HUNCHED OVER THE BREAKFAST TABLE wearing a T-shirt loose over his uniform pants. His eyes, purple smudged from lack of sleep, stared unseeing at Maura's busy hands.

"I don't know — either you or the washing machine must live on shirt buttons," his wife said, biting the thread. "Here you are, Garda Patrolman Kelly, all buttons present and accounted for." She rose and in passing draped the shirt across her husband's shoulders. "Where'll you be today, Sandymount or —."

She didn't finish the question, dreading the possible answer. Too often of late policemen had been taken from their districts to be deployed shoulder to shoulder along O'Connell Street, bright blue helmets buckled under the chin, ready to avert any trouble that might arise in the City Centre.

"It could do with a cleaning, you know," Maura went on, giving a final brush to the dark blue tunic hanging on the back of the door. "Well, that's the best I can do. What happened to your identification number?"

"It's in my pocket, safer that way when the country lads wear no numbers and the boys from Cork wear numbers only. You see us Dubliners are doubly blessed, we wear easily identifiable letters as well as numbers —"

"I know all that, love; I just wondered where they were so I can pin them on."

"I told you where: in my pocket. I told you why: safer," he snapped. "First the sergeant told us to remove all identification, then we were ordered to baton-charge the rioting Protest Marchers. That way no reprisals can be made on police families when the cry of 'police brutality' hits the headlines." He fingered the bandage that covered the split skin on his swollen cheekbone. "I don't know where it's all going to end — the crime rate is unreal, and now with the upsurge in the drug —"

"You haven't mentioned Martin Brophy lately. I wonder how he's getting along," Maura interrupted.

"Alright, I suppose." Kelly walked through the house buttoning his uniform jacket. "And about riot duty, you don't have to worry about it today, at least not that I know of." At the front door he turned. "I don't mean to be biting your head off, you know that, love," he said, leaning down to kiss Maura on the tip of her nose. "I'm glad you mentioned Martin, I'll drop by the hospital on the way home so don't worry if I'm a little late for tea."

As always, Maura watched Shay out of sight as he walked along Tritonville Road toward the Irishtown Garda Station marvelling that, after twelve years of marriage, her heart still leapt at the sight of his tall slim body.

WHEN KELLY REACHED ST. BRENDAN'S WARD IN ST. PATRICK'S Hospital he felt as though his clothes were glued on. Dublin was grey with rain laden clouds and the humidity was oppressive. Even the starch-crisp nurses looked crumpled and more crumpled than any was the matron, Anna Conway, who was counting pills into small paper cups lined on a metal tray.

"Is it yourself, Seamus Kelly?" the matron said over her shoulder as she passed the tray through a window to the nurse on duty in the locked ward. "I could do with a little tranquillizing myself on a day as heavy as this. What brings you here with the bus strike and all?"

"Martin Brophy, o'course. And why would I be bothered with the bus strike at all when I have me Nifty Fifty?" Kelly said, shedding white motorcycle helmet and black leather gauntlets.

"You missed him by six weeks or so, he's long home by now. Didn't he write you?"

Shay shook his head as he recalled he hadn't seen his friend since May, before the first Hunger Striker, Bobby Sands' death had sent mourners storming through Dawson Street to break shop windows and

set parked cars on fire. And now it was almost July.

"Sure, if you'd heard from him you wouldn't be here now. But don't look so sad, Shay, Danny knew you came to see him when you could." Matron Conway leaned her head against the frame of the small window that faced the ward where Martin had lived with men who stood, sat, shook, made faces, stared, declaimed. "I miss him — he was the only bright spot."

Kelly touched her arm. "I'll phone him, tell him what you said," he said to comfort her.

"It's Dublin ruins them, you know. The loneliness and wanting to belong. This city's no place for country boys like Martin. Jervis Street Drugs Clinic has its hands full trying to keep the young ones out of places like this. But Martin's cured now and back home, safe from temptation."

"Well, I best be off," Shay said buckling on his helmet.

"It was nice seeing you, give my best to Maura," Anna Conway said as they moved towards the stairs. "Do they know who killed that Sheena Bawn yet? I was in her fashion boutique once — but those prices! No wonder she was strangled."

"And what would I be knowing about a murder so? Me with feet like two pancakes. It's the plain clothes lads from the Castle who can answer you that," Shay ran quickly down the stairs.

AND SO TIME PASSED, A WEEK, A MONTH, SHOVING THE beautiful Sheena's murder into limbo. The Sheena Bawn Boutique she had built into legend was taken over by Eye-Spy Fashions and to all intents and purposes it was as though the outrageous darling of the "Rag Trade" never had existed — as far as the newspapers were concerned.

Then, in late August Sheena Bawn was once more splashed across the front page as the headlines screamed about new clues. All the information, to date, was set out in column after column. There was a picture of the maid who had found her body, only this time she was smartly dressed, having used to advantage the sum earned from her "I Knew Sheena Well" expose that ran for several weeks in the News of the World. It told how the murder had taken place between one a.m. and three a.m. on a Saturday night. Sheena had been beaten, then strangled with the cord of her negligee. There were several pictures of her small Town House taken inside and out. A chalk outline on the floor of the hall showed where her body had been found. A coffee table with two glasses, a decanter and an overflowing ashtray was featured on

page three; other pictures showed the shambles left by a house-wide search for something.

"Must you read all that again? As far as I can see there's nothing new," Maura said to Shay who was reading the evening paper to Declan Fogarty.

"Yes, there is," Shay's voice was tight. "Look at this." He called her over from the sink where she was washing dishes. A two column Identikit picture of a young man stared beneath the heading: DO YOU KNOW THIS MAN. The caption read:

*The above Identikit photograph is said by witnesses to be an approximate likeness of a young man who was last seen with Sheena Bawn. They left Sandboys Disco on Leeson Street a few minutes before midnight in a taxicab. This man was in his late twenties, six feet tall with close cut dark hair. He wore an Aran cardigan, dark trousers and a T-shirt.*

"Well, it looks like Martin Brophy but —"

"Martin Brophy?" Declan Fogarty interrupted Maura.

"Ummm, he was the boy Shay went to see at St. Patrick's Hospital," she said, pouring new boiled water into the teapot. "You and your tea, Declan Fogarty. It wouldn't surprise me if your insides float away." She set the pot on the table. And you, you gurrier, I suppose you're after wanting something to eat," she addressed the huge sable and tan Alsatian who sat patiently beside his food bow.

"Don't you mind her, Mannix, her bark is worse than her bite," Declan said, laughing. Shay had brought the blind man and his dog home on the night of the fire. "All we use is the garden flat, that leaves the whole upstairs empty —" Shay had offered as they had stood together, shivering in the street watching Fogarty's home for twenty years go up in smoke despite the efforts of the Fire Department. Gratefully, Declan and his furry companion had accepted on a temporary basis that soon became permanent. Man and dog settled in, filling the void left by Aunt Mae's tragic death.\* Besides, Maura felt safer with Mannix in the house when Shay was on night duty. "Did you know him well?" the blind man asked.

"Not 'did', Declan; we don't know for sure it's Martin. He has short dark hair o'course and he's an inch or two shorter than I am and he has an Aran cardigan, but name someone who doesn't." He turned to the back page. "Look here: According to another witness, Sheena Bawn was seen getting into a sports car with the same man a few minutes

\* *Dying In Dublin, MSMM, March 1979*

*past twelve.* At nine the next morning the cleaning woman found her dead in the bedroom. Her small Town House showed of a struggle.” Shay laid down the paper. “I don’t know — if voices are raised in O’Connell Street the newspapers scream ‘riot’; when a house looks as though it suffered through a minor war they say it ‘showed signs of a struggle’ — I just don’t know.” Shay shook his head.

BETWEEN COLLARING A YOUTH MAKING OFF WITH AN elderly dog walker’s handbag, answering several housebreaking calls, stopping a pub brawl and sending out an all points on a car theft, Kelly spent the night on duty thinking about Martin Brophy when he visited him in the hospital. How he looked, his attitude, things he said which didn’t seem to make sense at the time. Now, however, in the light of the Identikit picture in the paper, the seeming non-sequiturs possibly could have significance — it was a thought anyway.

Occasionally, he stopped under a street lamp to write something in his notebook as he walked the beat along Sandymount Road, around the Green, across Claremont and back on Tritonville, his Walkie-Talkie spluttering demands for attention every few minutes. It wasn’t until daylight poked tentative fingers through the Dublin smog that it occurred to Shay the Identikit picture very probably was not his friend Martin. After all, it was only a composite made from a fleeting glimpse caught in a drink-blurred memory.

At the barracks Kelly poured himself a cup of tea and went into the office. “Hey, Mick, how’s about using the phone?” he asked a balding man in shirtsleeves sitting with feet on the desk reading a racing form.

“I don’t see you offering me a cup o’ tea,” Mick said without looking up. “What do you think of Sandow in the Third at the Curragh?”

“Ought to do grand. Here take my tea, I can get another cup. Now, can I use the telephone?”

“I didn’t say I wanted tea, all I said was you didn’t offer me a cup and what do you know about horses anyway?” Mick put the telephone into a drawer and closed it.

“It’s only a phone call, Mick, and the phone belongs to the Garda Siochana — they pay the bill — it’s no skin off your nose, you know,” Liam O’Connor said in passing the open door.

“And it’s your beat you should be walkin’, Liam O’Connor, not tellin’ me what to do with me own phone.” Mick went back to the horses.

“Don’t bother, Liam, I’m on the way home to the wife anyway. Sure I can phone from there.” Kelly fell into step beside the only other

patrolman assigned to Irishtown that topped six two. "When the auld one's in one of his moods, forget it. Look, Liam, would you check out that Identikit in the Sheena Bawn case?"

"No problem — anything in particular?" O'Connor asked.

"Whatever the papers didn't print. See ya." Kelly turned into the laneway toward his house on Tritonville Road.

AN HOUR LATER SHAY WAS SLUMPED AT THE KITCHEN TABLE eating a cheese omelet. "Sometimes the Irish Telephone System is something out of a horror movie," he said between bites. "Over an hour and when I finally did get through to Martin's mother it was all I could do to hear. Anyway, he didn't go home from hospital; he stayed right here in Dublin. She gave me a phone number of a flat on Harrington Street. I phoned there but the lad who answered said Martin put a week's rent on a room but never moved in.

Maura refilled his cup and poured one for herself. "That was a couple months ago, funny to remember a thing like that."

"The lad said he was a friend. Look, love, I know the loose stuff's supposed to taste better but it puts me off getting those leaves in my mouth."

"I'll get tea bags so. I made some jam tarts last night, the kind you like with blackcurrent." Maura indicated the plateful of tiny pies on the table between them. "What about Delia? She should know where Martin is."

"As far as I know, that's over."

"Ummm — but they were living together, you know. And as she just lives around the corner . . ."

SIX NAMELESS BLACK BUZZERS FELT THE PRESSURE OF Shay's finger before Delia Considine opened the door to deny knowing anyone named Martin Brophy. "Nobody's in but me," she added.

"Really. Martin Brophy brought you to the Christmas Party at the Guarda Club. Surely you can't have forgotten your flat mate."

"Oh, *that* Martin," Delia said, her eyes sliding away. "You're the cop in the village," she accused, trying to close the door over his size eleven.

"He didn't go home after he left hospital so Maura, the wife, said to try you. We're friends." Shay indicated his sweatshirt/jeans get up. "It's not like I'm on duty or anything."

"Why me? I haven't seen him in months. Sorry."

Shay shrugged and withdrew the shoe, hoping it was still intact. She closed the door firmly. Aware that she watched from behind lace

curtains, Kelly walked almost to Sandymount Green before doubling back to where his Honda 50 was chained to a railing.

Disguised by helmet, leather jacket and gauntlets, Shay fiddled with the back wheel while waiting to see what, if anything, Delia Considine would do. He didn't have long to wait. Within five minutes Delia, carrying a shopping bag and a bedroll, hurried around the corner and on to a number 3 bus. On O'Connell Street she crossed to the stop in front of Cleary's Department Store where she boarded a 19A. By now Kelly made an educated guess as to exactly where the girl was headed — the South Circular Road and Sheena Bawn's house. It was the end unit in the terrace of six attached Town Houses, as the Estate Agents call them in the Classifieds. Recently it had been restored, which made its five companions seem out of place as their condition went from barely habitable to derelict.

Caught at the lights behind a giant tanker, Kelly almost missed seeing Delia disappear around the far end of the terrace. Hurriedly shackling his bike to a bus stop, Shay followed her along a narrow walkway that led back to a large well manicured soccer field where neighborhood children spent Sunday afternoons. A six foot brick wall surrounded the field separating it from the "flats," a police no-go area, on the north side and the back gardens of the terrace houses on the south. Its entire length was in good repair except where it joined the old cement used to enclose the end house. Here it had crumbled away to a pile of rubble that made an easy scramble for Delia whose upper part hove into view. Shay ducked out of sight behind stacked litter bins. Without hurrying, the girl dusted off her cords, finger combed her curly red hair while moving through the narrow lane. She turned right onto the South Circular Road. As she was unencumbered even by a handbag, it was obvious she had left the bundles with Martin. For a moment Shay considered bearding his friend but then he'd never know why Delia was heading for Dolphin's Barn, away from the nearest bus stop in front of the third terrace house.

Lengthening his stride, Kelly caught up with her just outside the Laundramat. When she saw who was walking beside her she jumped like a scalded cat.

"You bastard, you followed me," she accused when the power of speech had returned. But her attention was on a sports car that was pulling away from the curb twenty yards ahead. "Damn you," she said.

**WITHOUT A WORD SHAY PILOTED HER INTO THE NEAREST pub. Over a brandy the girl told him he had no right to follow her. She**

told him she would report him to his Sergeant. She told him he was a nosy son-of-a-bitch. It was then she began to shout.

"Damn you! I had a date and he went away when he saw you bothering me. You won't get away with it," she cried loud enough to attract the attention of the bartender who was serving two drunks near the door of the otherwise empty pub. "Why the hell did you have to follow me?" She began to cry.

"You alright, Missy?"

The bartender came toward their table. Shay sent him on his way with a flash of his identity card and an order for another round of drinks.

"Now tell me what all the shouting is about," Kelly addressed Delia for the first time since catching up with her.

"There's nothing to tell." She found a tissue in her pocket. "Absolutely nothing, so I don't know why you're wasting money to buy me brandy." She wiped away her momentary sorrow.

"Just a minute ago you put the wind up the barman with your roaring, now you say there's nothing to tell. Alright, have it your way but like I said, this isn't official. Martin is a friend. I knew him when he was a kid back home in Clare, kind of big brothered him before I left to come to the Big Smoke." As Shay spoke, Delia watched her hands shred the tissue.

"She was sleeping with him again," she said at last. "That's why we broke up. Though what Sheena Bawn wanted with Martin —" she shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine."

"You say *she* was sleeping with *him*. Why not the other way around?" Delia shrugged again. "How did he meet her?"

"He worked at this dressmaking place — it's gone now, building and all. It was on Liffey Street. He swept and went out for coffee, you know." She paused. "Well, it was his first job." Her tone was defensive. "That's where he met Emer Murphy. She was a secretary or something — quite a bit older than Martin —" Delia sighed. "Oh, what good is all this —"

She half rose. Shay caught her hand.

"Please, tell me what else you know." For the first time, the girl really looked at Shay, his steady eyes, his firm chin, the open earnestness of him.

"Alright. I met him at a pub after Emer Murphy went to London. He was quite broken up and into drugs — not the hard kind. Pills, cannabis, you know. And — well, I'm one of those people who feed stray cats, so I took him in and, I don't know, we seemed to kind of hit it off. It wasn't until she came back he went mainlining."

"So Emer Murphy came back, what has that —"

Delia hushed him with a flap of an impatient hand. "She came back with dyed blonde hair, all the money in the world and a brand new name: Sheena Bawn. Just how stupid could she be taking Bawn as a name. Can you see me calling myself Delia Beautiful?"

"What happened after she came back?" Delia stared into her glass unsure of how to continue. "Delia — what happened after she came back?" he prodded after a few silent minutes had passed.

She looked up. "It's just I don't want to get Martin into trouble. Can I go now?" She looked at Shay undecided.

"Please, Delia."

"Well, he went to work for her after she opened the boutique. I never found out what he did — but he didn't live with her again, at least I don't think he did. Next thing I heard he was in the hospital."

"Did you visit him?"

"Why? He'd left me. Then sometime during the night Sheena Bawn was killed, Martin came back. When I woke up in the morning, there he was huddled in a chair — he still had keys, you know."

"Then what?" Getting anything out of her was like pulling teeth, Shay thought. If she didn't speed up a bit it would be "Holy Hour" when all pubs had to close shop from 2:30 till 3:30.

"He stayed with me, never stuck his nose out of my flat, not once in all that time. Then, when I came home yesterday from the Supermarket, where I work on check-outs, he was gone. I was so worried I called in sick this morning in case he tried to get in touch. It was lucky I did. About an hour before you came to the door he phoned and asked me to bring him a sleeping bag and some food. He gave me directions and told me not to look for him. I was just to drop the things inside the broken window, I imagine it was the kitchen, and go."

"Did he ever mention Sheena Bawn or tell you why he was scared to go out of the flat?"

"I never said he was scared but he was o'course." She frowned. "No, I can't think of anything." Shay took the notebook from his pocket and flipped through until he found what he wanted.

"Does the name Peter McGuire mean anything to you?"

"His first boss was Mac something — he could have been Peter McGuire."

"How about 'pins and needles, needles and pins,' no matter what he always wins.' He looked up at Delia, she shook her head. The bartender called "Time" from the front of the bar where the drunks still lingered.

Delia glanced over at him. "We'd best be going," she said as she

moved quickly toward the door. It was just as well, Shay thought; he had pushed the girl as far as he could in one sitting.

"If I had me other helmet I'd give you a lift home," he apologized when they reached the nearest busstop. "About your date, I'm sorry I messed it up. I suppose it was the sports car pulled away —."

She glanced sideways at him suddenly flustered. "There was no one — I was just coddling you," Delia interrupted, and he knew she was lying. "But I'll tell you this much, the name of the place where Martin worked was Gay Girl Gear You know 'gay' like in happy." There was a skreek of brakes, a bus paused, and she was gone.

**ON THE PREMISE THAT BUSINESSES HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO** move to a new address when the old one becomes a building site, Kelly's next port of call was Dublin Castle: the Company Records Office. There for a small fee one could find out just how financially limited a Limited Company was. For ten pence a page the contents of any registered business's folder could be photocopied from front to back including all debentures, complaints, etc.

After a ten minute wait, the revolving index from E to H became vacant. The GAY GIRL GEAR, Ltd. listing was cross referenced with EYE-SPY, Ltd. As they shared the same index number it would seem the latter was a subsidiary of the former. Shay backtracked to the E's just to make sure and, having written down the folder number, he joined the queue at counter number four.

Fifty pence purchased the privilege of waiting thirty-five minutes for the dumb waiter to bring the folder up from the basement archives. It was worth every minute of the time spent. Right there big as life was Peter J. McGuire, Managing Director of both Gay Girl Gear and Eye-Spy. The voting shares were divided 60/40 with Emer Murphy named as the lesser stock holder. There were no debentures or complaints. When a photo copier came free, Shay's long arm beat an elderly gentleman to the coin slot. "All I need is one copy," the young Guard excused himself.

As the Drug Squad Headquarters were just across the tarmac, Kelly chanced that Billy Doyle was on duty. He wasn't. "Got an envelope?" he asked a girl typist while he scribbled on the back of the photo copy that Sheena Bawn and Emer Murphy were one and the same. "Don't forget to give it Billy as soon as he comes in," Shay said and headed for EYE-SPY on St. Stephen's Green.

**IT WAS ONE OF THOSE OVER-PRECIOUS BOUTIQUEY-BOU-**тиques that are such an anathema to a practicing male. To one side near

the back of the shop a bevy of rainbow-haired creatures of indeterminate persuasion hovered together until he drew near. Then one separated itself from the group to offer assistance. Kelly asked to see Peter McGuire and a telephone was thrust into his hand.

"This is Peter McGuire speaking, what's you problem?" a pleasant baritone identified itself.

And after the usual exchanges about the weather, Shay wondered if he could help him find his friend Martin Brophy. Adding that as he was in Dublin for a few days he had promised the Mammy to look him up. The lilt of Clare Kelly recalled to his tongue lent credence to the claim of being on holiday.

After a series of let-me-see-now's, McGuire withdrew someone named Martin from his memory bank. However, he wasn't at all sure the last name was Brophy. "It seems this yoke worked on Liffey Street at Gay Girl Gear, 'gay' as in happy, you know. That was a while ago, before they tore down the building," he said. Several more meaningless pleasantries were exchanged before McGuire, sorry not to have been able to help, hung up the phone.

Delia had said the very same thing when she had told him about Gay Girl Gear: "gay as in happy," Shay thought while waiting for the lights at Dawson Street. Of course it could have been coincidence. Ever since the word "gay" had taken on a different connotation, people felt an explanation was necessary when it wasn't linked with "liberation." The girl could have heard Martin say it and simply repeated the phrase. But Shay didn't think that was the case. He felt sure there was some connection between Delia Considine and McGuire. The lights flashed green. An impatient horn urged the bike across the intersection.

There were so many questions McGuire should have been asked, like when it was Emer Murphy had changed her name and why. Did he know Delia Considine — if so, was she in his employ — all peripheral questions, of course, but the answers could provide —

But what was the use, he interrupted the train of thought; nobody could question a man satisfactorily over the telephone. It had to be face to face — it was reaction, not words or tone of voice that gave the game away. A narrowing of an eye, a muscle tightening along the jaw, so many nuances of expression that could pinpoint a lie — yes, he thought, it would be best for him to see McGuire in the morning. Wear his uniform, drop the "Culchie" accent — odds were he wouldn't be recognized by the hired help as the leather jacketed biker of the day before.

Thinking of the next morning brought Maura to mind. He had half

promised to take her to the seashore, it being his day off — weather permitting. Maybe a chat with Martin would clear the whole thing up. According to Delia, the lad was holed up in one of the houses in Sheena Bawn's terrace. This being the case, he shouldn't have wasted time at the Castle or Eye-Spy. He reddened just thinking of the photo copy left with the Drugs Squad for Billy Doyle. Homicide would have made more sense.

The bike swung away from Sandymount along the Canal toward the South Circular Road. He was on his way to do what should have been done as soon as Delia Considine was safely on the bus. A car passed so close Kelly was surprised to see cloth still covered his knee. It also underlined the fact that he wasn't paying proper attention to driving. Had he been less contemplative he might have noticed the sports car that followed a discreet distance behind his little red Honda 50.

**WHEN TEATIME CAME AND WENT WITH NO WORD FROM HER** husband, Maura began to worry. "He hasn't been to bed, you know, since coming off duty and he was knackered when he went out," she said to Declan Fogarty who was finishing his cup of tea. "And what do I do with this?" She held up a manilla envelope. "I never open Shay's mail but it's EXPRESS and marked URGENT on both sides. It came in the afternoon post." She set it on the mantle. "Well, that's that. I might as well wash up."

The blind man told her not to worry, Shay would be home soon. He told her Shay had probably stopped in at the barracks or the pub. "It stays light so late this time of year it's easy for teatime to slip by unnoticed. Sure it's not like the winter time when dark comes at four o'clock, you know."

Fogarty's words belied his true feelings. Seamus Kelly was unique in a society with no word as urgent as manana in its vocabulary — he was a dependable man. Declan, too, was worried. Just then Mannix interrupted to announce someone was about to ring the doorbell.

"See, there's your man now," Fogarty said. "Forgot his keys so he did." But he was wrong. It was not Shay who followed Maura into the kitchen; it was Liam O'Connor.

"Sit down, Liam, I'll get you a cup of tea," Maura said. But the tall Guard refused, saying he was late signing off duty.

"Where's himself? You alright, Declan? Mannix taking good care of you?" he asked without sitting down. "Tell him I'll see him later, bye now."

Eight o'clock came and went — nine — ten. At ten thirty Maura decided to go around the corner to Delia Considine's with Declan and

Mannix in tow. "She might know where Shay went," she hoped all the way over, only to be disappointed when the girl said she hadn't seen Kelly since he put her on the bus at Dolphin's Barn.

"But that was half two, where can he have gone? It's almost eleven now," Maura said unlocking the door. "Ain't you coming in?"

"Not yet, it's a warm night and Mannix could do with a bit of a walk." He paused to adjust the big dog's harness before setting off along Tritonville Road toward Clark's Pub across the way from the barracks.

"Hey, Declan, over here," Liam O'Connor called as Mannix pushed through the door with his protege. "How's about a pint and a bit in a bowl for the hound?"

"Not now, Liam, don't have time. Did any of you see Seamus Kelly?" Fogarty's voice cut through the chatter. The men, mostly off duty police, answered in the negative as they moved to one side to let him pass. "If you've got the car I'd appreciate you give us a lift," he said when Liam took his arm.

"I will o'course," O'Connor said and drained his glass.

"Delia Considine said she saw Shay at Dolphin's Barn around a quarter to three. He's followed her to the terrace where the Bawn woman was killed. I don't really think he's still around here but it's a starting point."

"I think that's his cycle," Liam slewed across to a stop on the wrong side of the street and got out of the car. "Yeah, it's Shay's alright; I'd know that black and white striped top box anywhere." He rattled a chain. "All locked up just the way he left it." Liam tapped on the window. "Any ideas?" he said when it was wound down.

"When I lived on Herbert Road, before the Kellys took us in, many's the time I used to send Mannix to find Shay in the village when I needed something from the shops." As he spoke he removed the dog's harness.

This is not Sandymount; this area is a whole new ballgame for Mannix. But if you think Kelly could be over there in the murder house, why don't I get the lads on patrol to check for you?"

"And get Sergeant Clancy's bowels in an uproar. You know how he loves it when Shay does any unauthorized poking around," Declan said, letting Mannix out of the car. "Find Shay, go find Shay and bring him to me now," he commanded.

Like a dark shadow the big dog loped across the momentarily empty street, paused to catch a scent and disappeared from sight.

"Too bad the days are getting short. Night duty is so much easier when there's only three hours of dark and even then there's a glow on

the horizon." Liam's nerves kept his tongue wagging while he strained to catch a glimpse of the big dog. He glanced over at Declan, who was fidgeting with the harness, and reached out in sudden pity for his blindness.

"Don't you go feeling sorry for me, Liam O'Connor." Fogarty shrugged off the hand touching his shoulder. "Me eyes might be knackered but there's nothing wrong with me ears and I tell you I can hear Mannix coming back."

Liam listened. "I don't hear anything," hardly was out of his mouth before the door on his side was being pawed. He opened it to ninety-five pounds of Alsatian that hurled himself onto his lap. Mannix touched Declan's face with a cold nose.

"It's alright, old friend, I know you tried to find him," Declan said as the dog bounded out of the car.

"Mannix! Get in the car!" Fogarty ordered the dog who was talking in excited little growls as he danced away from the car and back again.

"Okay, okay Declan," O'Connor interrupted. "I think he's found something. At least he wants me to follow him. Now lock all the doors and keep the windows shut until I get back. Alright, Mannix, I'm coming, you don't have to tear the pants off me."

Mannix raced back the way he had come, around the end house to the soccer field, over the crumbling brick wall, across the back garden and as straight as an arrow through a broken window and up the stairs with Liam close on his heels. Small whimpers led O'Connor back toward the box room at the rear where he tripped over something soft. He knelt beside a body.

"Doesn't look too good, Mannix," Liam said as the tiny flame from his lighter played on Shay's battered face. He felt his friend's throat for a pulse. "Stay, boy, stay! I'll phone for an ambulance."

TOO ANXIOUS TO STAY INDOORS, MAURA WAS STANDING BY the gate when Liam drove up to take her to the Meath Hospital. "We found him," he said.

"Is he alive?"

"He's alive," Liam told her and mentally added the word *barely*. She'd find out soon enough that the doctors held little hope of Shay's recovery. And even if he did come out of the coma, odds were he'd suffered severe brain damage.

Looking through the window in the door of the Intensive Care Ward, it seemed to Maura she was watching a badly televised hospital drama. Everything seemed unreal, including the nurse attached to her elbow steering her into the small adjacent waiting room. "Try not to worry,

love, your husband will have the very best care. He has a broken jaw and three fractured ribs and Mr. O'Dwyer, the finest brain surgeon in Ireland, is on the way from the Adelaide in case an operation is necessary."

"Operate? Operate on Shay but —" Maura allowed herself to be seated between Declan and Liam. "You say his brain?"

"Don't worry, everything humanly possible is being done for him. We have the finest, most modern electronic equipment available. Relax now and don't sit there clutching that letter." The nurse unwrapped Maura's fingers from the letter wearing the Express sticker and the word "Urgent" and gave it to Liam. "I'll get you some tea, it'll make all of you feel better." Flashing a smile, she was gone.

"I think you should open it, Maura; it's marked 'urgent.'" Liam held the envelope toward the woman.

"I never open Shay's mail," she said, hands folded in her lap.

"Liam's right," Declan said, feeling lost without his seeing-eye who was locked outside in Liam's car.

"What do you think, love?" When she didn't answer, O'Connor slid a key under the flap. "Thanks, Sister," Liam acknowledged the tray of tea and biscuits. "It's from Martin Brophy." He looked over at Maura, who stared fixedly at the door that separated her from Shay Kelly.

He read to the end of the close written page before speaking. "It's all here, Sheena Bawn's murderer, that Delia Considine, everything. I'd best get this down to the cop shop."

"You'll just get Shay in trouble; you know how mad Sergeant Clancy gets when he goes off on his own investigating —"

"Ever since the ambulance picked up Shay from South Circular Road, he has been in trouble with Clancy. After all, he was found in the same terrace of houses where the Bawn woman was murdered. Anyways, Clancy was here when they brought him in. He told me to keep him posted. He also said that Shay was a good cop even if he did fancy himself a one man Garda Siochana," Liam told Maura, who had gone back to staring as though her eyes could penetrate the wood. "Who's the yoke in the drug squad Seamus knows?"

He addressed the woman but Declan answered.

"Billy Doyle," he said. "You know him, too. He's the baldy one Shay's always ragging about being the Irish Yul Brynner."

"Look, here are the car keys in case Mannix needs a leak; I'll hop a cab for the Castle."

THREE DAYS PASSED WITH NO CHANGE IN KELLY'S CONDITION. Three days filled with newspaper headlines: SHEENA BAWN'S

**MURDERER CAPTURED — BIGGEST DRUG HAUL EVER - DRUGS RING SMASHED** and dozens of pictures. Pictures of the murderer, his place of business, his female accomplice, plastic bags behind tiny mounds of white powder, with each newspaper trying to out sensationalize the other. The street price of the narcotics involved ranged from three million pounds up to seven million, depending on which paper most needed to hype circulation.

At one time or another all the cops on the Irishtown beat stopped by to peer into the Intensive Care Ward; Maura slept fitfully on a bed in a nearby room. Mannix lived in O'Connor's car with an occasional trot around the block to the "chipper" for a meal with Declan, who hated everything deep fried.

More time passed; other news crowded both Sheena and the drugs out of print. Then, nine days after being found unconscious in the deserted house on the South Circular Road, Seamus Kelly opened his eyes. Twenty-four hours later he was transferred out of Intensive Care to a four bed ward. His lack of any brain damage occasioned much good natured slagging about the thickness of skulls in the County Clare from his Barracks mates — including Sergeant Clancy who didn't say a single word about Shay's unauthorized curiosity.

Throughout this period of healing, Kelly spoke little, seeming content to lie with hand clasped tight in Maura's two small ones, savouring his return to the world. Perhaps his silence was caused by the pain of articulating. Perhaps he had suffered a slight amnesia. Whatever the reason, Maura couldn't have cared less; it was enough that her man was well on the road to being discharged. Which is why no mention of the house on South Circular Road was made; no questions were asked until the afternoon Liam O'Connor walked in with Martin Brophy in tow. Hurt darkened Shay's eyes as he recognized his friend from Clare.

"Was it you hit me?" blurred through wired together jaws. "Was it you followed me up the stairs?"

"I told you everything in the letter," Martin said. Shay looked at Maura brow questioning. She nodded.

"We had to open it. It was marked 'urgent' and had a red express sticker, and you were in a coma."

"Sure an' you never got it. I left for Dun Laoghaire after posting it. Took the Ferry to Holyhead. I was scared, Shay, I was scared for my life. But when I read in the Mirror you were on the critical list I came back." Martin took a cigarette from the pack in his pocket, glanced at Shay and put it behind his ear. "Better not to smoke I guess."

"I think we best take it from the beginning, but before another word

I better get Declan. You know he'll never forgive us if he isn't in on the denouement, as the French say," Liam said going toward the door. "And I'll get a couple more chairs while I'm at it."

"Is it alright I start?" Martin asked when everyone was seated.

He glanced questioningly at the other beds, one of which contained an elderly snorer, another a long-haired youth with both ears plugged into a transistor. The third bed was empty. Liam nodded.

"Well, first thing I got to Dublin I looked in the Classifieds and there was this ad for youths with no experience. So I went up to the Gay Girl Gear factory and Pete McGuire gave me the job of work. It was just sweeping up, going out for coffee, you know — odd jobs. It was a place made women's clothes and this Emer Murphy designed some of them. I didn't have a place to stay, so she said she had a room I could rent. She had this big old flat in Rathmines in those days and —"

A series of what seemed to be hisses interrupted.

"What was that?" Martin leaned close, Shay repeated the sounds.

"Why don't you write down what you want to say, love?" Maura's move toward pad and pen was halted by a flap of Kelly's hand.

"It's okay, Maura," Martin grinned. "He was trying to say: Sheena Bawn. Anyway, she was still using the name of Emer Murphy then. Then everything began to fall apart. The building next door to the factory was declared unsafe, so it was decided to pull down the ones on either side. When Gay Girl closed shop there, Emer went to London. I saw her off on the plane. That was the day I met Delia Considine in the Airport bar. Course most things I remember from then are pretty hazy — I was well into pill popping, canabis, nothing really heavy — you know the usual crack —."

"Gay Girl was just a front for pushers," Liam explained.

"It was o'course." Martin frowned, annoyed at the interruption. "Then somehow, I don't know, Delia said I could share her flat —"

"You really have all the luck with birds. All I was ever able to get for a room mate is Mannix," Declan laughed.

"Yeah, well, anyway I got into heroin, coke — anything. And Pete McGuire was real generous for awhile. Then he cracked down, wouldn't even give me a joint — nothing. When I was climbing the walls, he suggested I push the Techs: Kevin Street, Ring's End, Bolton Street, you know. If I did I could have all I needed. What could I do? Where was I to get the bread? Then there was that bad lot sold on the street — killed a few. I was lucky. After Jervis Street I went to St. Patrick's. That was the first time the locals began to admit the Irish youth was into drugs, it wasn't just something the tourist did in Ireland. Anyway, when I came out of hospital Delia was right there.

Took me back to her flat, tried to get me back on the stuff, but I wasn't having any of it. By that time I'd decided to go to the Drugs Squad, but first I had to get something concrete. That's when I went back to Sheena. She'd gone to London to make her own contact, you know. Through Hong Kong, she said. Set up her own boutique with all kinds of quilted gear. That's how the stuff came in, you know, the bolts of padded cloth — certain patterns only o'course. The heroin was in slender tubes of plastic and put into channels the way Continental quilts are made. I knew all this so what I was trying to do was get a length of cloth to take to the Drugs Squad —"

"So when she came back, Sheena was on her own? She was no longer with Peter McGuire? Hummm, so that was why she was killed," Maura said.

"Not at all. I did take Sheena home in a cab that night from Sandboys Disco — the night she was killed. No, her death had nothing to do with dope, not really. You see, she started out as a prostitute working the Burlington Road and she had this kid, a girl. She kept her with a family in Cork City, never saw her, but she had a whole scrapbook full of color snaps of the girl from birth right up to her sixteenth birthday when the kid ran away from home. That night she spotted her daughter freaked out of her mind draped around McGuire's neck. When she saw her there, all hell broke loose, and it was all I could do to get her into a cab. I put her in the house and went back to Sandboys but McGuire and the girl were gone. Then I went back to Sheena's and found her dead."

"It seems McGuire had known about the girl and was out to get Sheena Bawn for poaching his territory." All heads turned to Billy Doyle, who spoke from the doorway. "After all, she was backed by a London based Far East Syndicate."

"Well, if it isn't the hero of the Castle himself," Liam said. "Here, take a pew, I don't mind I stand for awhile."

"Yeah, she had dual nationality — Irish and English and when she came back as Sheena Bawn, both accent and passport were British. I said it had nothing to do with drugs — it didn't on Sheen's part. If she had kept her cool, probably she'd still be alive—"

"McGuire said he left the kid off at his flat and went to Sheena's. She flew at him all nails and teeth and he socked her around a bit and strangled her. You set us after McGuire, Shay, with that photocopy from the business records. When we picked up McGuire we could hardly keep his mouth shut — spilled everything about his end of the business. Not too much good — he was just small fry, a local with masters in the North. He sent those two yokes to put you out of the picture. They took his car and followed your Honda — he was nervous

anyone coming into his shop asking questions —”

“And Delia was my minder, my watchdog. I figured that for a long time, that's why I went up to the end house. I phoned her to bring the food and stuff. I watched. Sure enough two guys drove up in McGuire's sports car —”

Shay held up his hand for silence then after several unintelligible tries wrote: the same sports car I saw at the Barn with Delia. Both Billy Doyle and Martin nodded.

“So that's when I wrote you the note and took off for Dun Laoghaire.” Martin got up to stretch. “That's about it, I guess, pubs are open, how's about a pint?”

Liam and Declan followed Brophy to the nearest pub after releasing Mannix.

“So that's me back on duty. Just topped by to see how you were, old mate. And don't worry, you won't get too much stick from Clancy, we've been careful to keep your name out of the case.”

Shay flushed with the effort to speak clearly.

“Now, now I don't want to hear any bad language. Bye Maura, God Bless,” Billy Doyle said and was gone.

*She had the news scoop of a lifetime. An opportunity  
like this came only once!*

# The End of Joy

by SUSANNE SHAPHREN

Managing Editor  
The Evening Clarion

Dear Frank,

I'd give just about anything to be sitting across from your smug "Kid, you'll never make it as a reporter" expression and watch you choke on your words about nobody ever getting the real story about Sabrina Montrose.

As you can plainly see, I remembered those 5 W's you kept hammering away at. Who . . . Sabrina Montrose of course. What . . . just about the most successful (with sincere apologies to Dame Agatha) and elusive mystery novelist in recent history. Where . . . anywhere her whim suggests and for a little while that was a rustic cabin farther from civilization than I thought possible in this age of urban sprawl. When . . . just days or was it weeks ago when hard work and a bit of luck finally paid off? Why . . . to discover how Sabrina Montrose creates murder plots so technically perfect not even nitpickers can find fault with HE DESERVED TO DIE, NO CLUES LEFT BEHIND, AN UNNECESSARY FUNERAL, TOO MANY BUSY BODIES, WITHOUT A TRACE or any of her other best sellers.

You'll find a file of background material, what little there is, on my desk. Still no hint as to how the royalties are handled and no solid information about who Sabrina Montrose was before she became the Grandma Moses of the typewriter set. A few unsolved mysteries for a more experienced reporter to tackle, but the real story is enclosed.

Think you'll agree it's every bit as exciting as one of Sabrina's

novels.

Knowing your just-the-facts approach, I kept on a straight and narrow path of names, dates and places jotted down in a bits and pieces fashion when Sabrina wasn't looking and then brought together in what you'll have to agree is outstanding copy. A typewriter would have given me away so you'll have to make do with my chicken scratchings. Sorry.

How I located Sabrina Montrose will have to remain one of those "from usually reliable sources" secrets. Am sure you knew I'd do just about anything to get a chance at a really good feature exclusive.

When I found her, thought it best not to tell her I was a reporter; you know her attitude toward the "prying press."

To her, I was just a young woman running away from the pressures of city life and seeking a little peace and quiet. Told her the car had broken down and asked if I might stay on.

She seemed pleased to have company at first and readily accepted my offer to help with cooking and cleaning. When she told me who she was, I pretended to be surprised and admitted I'd read all her books.

Though a child could have seen I was laying on the compliments a bit thick, Sabrina Montrose just accepted them as her due. She wouldn't talk much about herself at first but later chatted quite freely. Almost as though she had to tell someone everything. Her sudden modesty was quite a surprise.

"I owe it all to my friends," she repeated again and again.

As a reporter with a willing subject, I would have dug beneath the simplicity of her words, but as one of her "friends" I dared not press the issue. By the time I learned what it really meant to be a friend of Sabrina's, it was much too late.

"A typewriter, a good basic diet and friends like you, child, are what keep life interesting." Sabrina raised her glass of milk to my snifter of her special Elderberry homebrew. She smiled as we clinked glasses. Insisted on refilling the snifter twice as she rambled on and on.

Listening sympathetically and picturing her confessions as last minute bargaining for eternal peace, I never realized the old woman was saying good-by only to me.

The enclosed story clearly documents each friend who became the unwilling subject of one of Sabrina's novels.

She's been gone about an hour now. Headed east from the middle of nowhere, destination unknown. Description: just another sweet grandmotherly type who's taken up a hobby to keep that sparkle in her eyes and retain the alertness of younger days.

No, she's not getting careless. There's a perfectly logical explanation for her leaving my car behind. After all, half the gas station

attendants between your office and here swore I'd never make it a mile down the road and that was before I gave Mother Nature a helping hand.

Once I was close enough to be sure my tip would pay off, I siphoned most of the gas into a Thermos and stashed it under the seat. Replacing my rotor with the faulty one we used for that auto repair fraud story was extra insurance in case Sabrina hiked up the path to check my story about the car.

Had I been a little smarter a lot sooner, there'd be no need to send this postage due from a mailbox luck helped me find. Won't bore you with the gory details; just wish I'd never swallowed Sabrina's home-brew.

Am holding you to your promise of a by-line on this one.

You'll have the wire services scooped if you disregard the -30- on the enclosed copy and add a paragraph about Sabrina Montrose's newest novel, THE END OF JOY. She works fast; it should be ready for publication soon.

Thanks for everything, Chief.

Love,

Joy

**GREATEST SPY ACTION SERIAL  
OF ALL TIME!**

**THE SECRET CODE**

A COLUMBIA SERIAL (Reprint)

with PAUL KELLY • ANNE NAGEL • Original screen play by Basil Dickey, Leighton Brill,  
Robert Beche • Directed by SPENCER G. BENNET

*"Say, sheriff," a voice came over the phone, "I'm not going to give my name, but a boat just went through town, right through Main Street, and there was a dog driving it."*

# Home Body

by WADE MOSBY

ELLIOTT FINCH HAD SPENT THREE DAYS MAKING SURE THAT everything was properly packed and tied down, and now it was nearly time to go. His new cabin cruiser, Sinkerswim, was snugged to its trailer. The trailer was hitched to the car.

Fishing tackle, luggage, bits of furniture for the cottage, all were stowed away in car trunk and cabin cruiser, and a bright blue tarpaulin was taut around the cruiser's companionway. Shipshape, Elliott observed with satisfaction.

Next was the problem of getting everybody tucked into the car and hitting the road. The children, Buzz and Eloise, fought over which one would sit in front. Neither, said Elliott. Both in back with Grandma, who was still fussing at Madge and threatening to lock herself in her room. The beagle, Deputy Dawg, upchucked on the living room carpet in all of the excitement.

Elliott put a harness and leash on Dawg and started toward the car.

"I'm not going to ride in the same car with that dog," Madge announced. "Lord knows how many more times he's going to yerk before we get to the cottage."

"Leave him here? He'd starve."

"Put him in your boat. There's plenty of room there."

It did seem to make sense. Elliott removed the tarp from the companionway, cleared a place for Dawg, tucked him in and put the tarp back in place.

"Everybody ready now?" he asked.

"I can help with the driving, Elliott," Grandma said. "I know the way. I could start out and . . ."

"Grandma," Elliott said, "Thanks a bunch, but with the boat trailer and everything, I think it would be better if I handled the driving."

"Mother," Madge put in, "you know you don't have a license. You surrendered it right after you creamed that Cadillac in the beauty parlor parking lot."

"I was just trying to be helpful," Grandma said as she settled into the back seat and a sulk at the same time. Things were not going to be pleasant. The kids piled in beside Grandma, kicking her purse as they pushed and shoved one another.

"Careful of my purse," Grandma gritted. "My nerve tonic is in there."

Elliott looked at his watch. Geez, 3 p.m. The trip would take six hours, with rest stops. That meant unloading at the cottage in the dark. Elliott thought of asking for a slug of that tonic, but instead started the car and pulled out.

BEFORE HE REACHED HIGHWAY 41, WHICH WOULD TAKE them most of the way to Little Turtle Lake, Grandma was complaining about the air conditioner. Madge turned it off. Elliott opened a window. Grandma complained about drafts. The kids squabbled over a comic book. Dawg's lonesome wail could be heard. People were staring.

Elliott tried to tune out all of the noises. He held the car at a steady 55, and the miles piled up behind them. Grandma stopped complaining and the kids dozed off.

"Some vacation, eh Madge?" Elliott grunted.

"It's always like this at the start, Ell," Madge said. "Things will settle down when we get to the cottage. There's so much to do there. I'm glad poor mother has fallen asleep. She needs her rest."

"I'm not asleep," Grandma said. "Just resting my eyes. That nerve tonic relaxes a person. Keep your eyes on the road, Elliott!"

It was getting dark when Elliott pulled into a wayside. The kids were out of the car before it stopped rolling.

"Would you like to get out and stretch your legs, mother?" Madge said. "We're at a wayside. There's a toilet here."

Mother didn't say anything.

Madge reached into the back seat and gently shook Grandma. She toppled over on the seat.

"Elliott! Do something!"

"I am," Elliott said. "I'm letting Dawg out."

"Come here! It's mother! I think she's . . . I think she may have passed away."

"Probably just pooped out from back seat driving. Let me take a look."

He felt Grandma's wrist, pushed her eyelids up, then pulled a blanket over her face.

"Madge," he said, "she went quietly. She's dead."

"Poor mama!" Madge wept. "She was always so cold!"

"She'll be warm enough now, Madge," he said, putting his arm around his wife.

"What do you mean by that, Elliott?" Madge asked.

"Well . . . she's beyond suffering."

"What do we do now?"

"I wish I knew," Elliott sighed. Wouldn't you know the old lady would figure out a way to screw up my vacation? He wondered where the kids were, and looked toward the central building. No kids, but there's a squad car. Maybe the cop will know what to do.

ELLIOTT FOUND DEPUTY T.A. SEGER (THAT'S WHAT IT SAID ON his shirt tag) coming out of the john, and told him what had happened.

"There's a funeral home sixty miles west of here," Seger said. "You could call there and they'd come out and pick up Mrs., er . . ."

"Higgins," Elliott supplied. "Jane Higgins."

"They might not get here for quite some time," Seger continued. "By law, I should report deaths in this county, but I have no way of knowing that Mrs. Higgins died in this county. When did you say she died?"

"We really don't know," Elliott said, "but she hasn't said anything for about three hours."

"Could have died three counties south of here," Seger said. "Look, Finch, I'm not going to make a report on this. And to tell you the truth, if you wait for someone to pick up the body, you've got a long, cold summer night ahead of you. And then there's the extra expense."

"What's extra expense?"

"They'll charge you for the pickup, round trip mileage, overtime for the driver and a helper, selling you a coffin and sending it, by hearse, all the way downstate."

"Do I have a choice?"

"If I were you, I'd just turn around and go back home."

"You mean, leave her here?"

"Not in my county! Take her home with you to a funeral home near

your residence."

"Is that legal?"

"No crime was committed. And as for a death . . . you didn't even talk to me."

"I gotcha, Officer Seger. Thanks. That's what I'll do."

ELLIOTT HAD JUST FINISHED TELLING MADGE THE PLAN when the children came back.

"Tell them," Madge said.

Elliott tried to make it sound as easy as possible.

". . . and so, we're just going to leave Grandma, nice and warm in her blanket, right in the back seat and go home."

"No way!" Eloise screeched. "I'm not going to ride in the same car with a stiff, even if it is grandma. I'll stay here until you come back for me. After the funeral, if possible."

"Goes for me," Buzz said. "You and mom take Grandma home and come back."

"Couldn't the kids ride in the boat with Dawg?" Madge asked.

"No. Too drafty back there. They'd freeze in the night air. Gets cold around here . . . but . . ."

"But what?"

"Well, I don't think Grandma would mind . . . now. I mean, it's only four or five hours, plus or minus a pit stop or two. I could tuck her in the starboard bunk, all safe and sound."

"It would be awfully lonely back there, with just the dog," Madge said.

"Well, I can't strap her to a fender." Elliott was getting impatient.

"Cover her up well, Elliott. You know about mama and drafts."

"And how."

By tying Dawg's harness to the Sinkerswim's wheel and moving the carefully stowed furniture, Elliott cleared a path to the bunk. Getting Grandma into it was easier than he expected. Wispy old broad to make so much racket, Elliott thought. He tucked her in and put a few extra cushions on top of her.

"I'll watch the air conditioning, Grandma," he said as he made his way aft.

Madge and the kids were in the car, lost in their own thoughts. Elliott sighed as he slipped behind the steering wheel. You've really done it to me this time, Grandma. Wrecked the best two weeks of the summer. He nursed his rig onto the highway and headed south.

A HALF HOUR LATER, BUZZ BROKE THE SILENCE.

"I'm hungry," he complained. "We haven't had anything to eat since noon."

"How could you, Buzz?" Madge demanded. "At a time like this!"

"He's right, you know, Madge," Elliott said. "We have to keep our strength up. I'll stop as soon as we see a hamburger stand or something."

Hamlets flickered by, well off the highway, by now a darkened path between pine trees. It was an hour before a brightly lit sign proclaimed "Eats — Truckers Welcome." The spacious parking lot looked like a display yard for semis and used passenger cars.

"It'll have to do," Elliott said, and guided his car, trailer and boat between two parked semis.

The place was heavy with tobacco smoke and the aroma of fried onions. It was crowded, for this time of the night, and a group of truck drivers were enjoying a happy hour over beers in one corner.

Elliott found a table, still heaped with the rejects from earlier diners, and the four of them sat. And sat. For 15 minutes or so. And then, "I'm Donna your waitress" showed up to scoop away the debris and take their orders.

An eternity went by before Donna returned. They ate in silence, each somewhat conscience-stricken at the thought of Grandma out there in the boat with only Dawg for company.

From the depths of a tote bag, Madge produced Dawg's water dish, filled it from her glass and awaited marching orders.

"Let's hit the road!" Elliott said after he had counted out his change from the bill.

Although they all followed meekly to the parking lot, there was one problem in the way of carrying out the order. Car, trailer, boat, Grandma and Dawg had disappeared into the night.

**ELLIOTT SAID WHAT WAS ON HIS MIND: "THIS IS NOT MY IDEA of how to start a vacation."**

"Well, DO something, Elliott," Madge said.

Elliott did. He called the nearest sheriff's office.

Within ten minutes, a squad car came boiling into the parking lot. Its headlights flicked past the Finches, huddled together in the middle of the lot, then pulled up. Deputy Andrew Boyd Stepped out of the car.

"Now then," he said, pulling out his note pad, "what's this about a vanishing boat?"

Elliott explained while Boyd jotted down the essentials.

"Is that all?" Boyd asked.

"Well, just one other thing. Mrs. Higgins."

"What about Mrs. Higgins?"

"She was in the boat."

"You mean we've got a kidnapping on our hands?"

"Well, not exactly. Technically, no."

"What does that mean?"

"Mrs. Higgins is, ah, dead."

Boyd looked at Elliott with renewed interest.

"Are you putting me on? Car, boat, dog, trailer, and now Mrs. Higgins?"

Elliott filled in the missing details. Including the beagle whose leash was tied to the boat's steering wheel.

Boyd thought about all of this and then made a terse report to the sheriff's office.

SOME TWENTY MILES SOUTH OF "EATS," AN '81 OLDS BARreled along Highway 41 southbound. Behind it was the car owned by Elliott Finch. And behind it was a trailer with a cabin cruiser on it. And from within it emanated a howl that only a lonely beagle could manage.

The Olds turned right onto a county highway, and the car and trailer behind it followed. Both pulled into a county park, now deserted. The drivers of both vehicles shut off their lights and engines, and met between the two cars. They admired their acquisitions in the moonlight.

"Not bad!" said Pierre Nord. "Car, boat and trailer — all with the magic lock-jack handled by my little brother, Dominic! We'll get a nice price for all three in Chicago!"

"Right you are, Pierre!" said Dominic. "Let's check 'em out before we get to the barn."

A low moaning from behind them riveted the brothers in their tracks. It gained in volume and pitch until it trailed off on an eerie high note. Dawg was telling the world that he was weary of being tied.

"Sheesh!" Dominic whispered. "What was that? A wolf? Let's get out of here!"

"Not so fast, little brother," said Pierre. "First, let us investigate. Kindly climb onto that boat and see what's making the racket."

Dominic put his shoulders back and his chest out. Pierre was right, of course. He always was. Dominic climbed onto the trailer and put the beam of his flashlight onto the blue tarpaulin. Resolutely, he began unlacing the tarp at the bow. One had heard of werewolves and such, but they were not for the likes of the brothers Nord.

He flipped the tarpaulin away from the cabin windshield and aimed his flashlight toward the interior. Dawg bared his teeth and lunged

toward the window. Dominic lurched backwards and fell from the deck to the head of Pierre.

The brothers untangled themselves.

"It's a beast!" gasped Dominic. "The face of a man and great, dripping fangs!"

Pierre decided that a consultation might be best. In the front seat of his car. Especially so when frantic scratching sounds threatened to release whatever it was from its glass prison.

"It probably is only a dog," Pierre announced. "You will see that is true when you enter the cabin."

"Me? You're out of your gourd, Pierre. If you want a dog, you enter the cabin."

"As you say," sighed Pierre, maintaining a cool front that was becoming more front and less cool by the moment.

"Take the flashlight," Dominic said. "I'll wait for you in your car."

Pierre tried to be nonchalant. He checked out the instrument panel of the stolen car, and noted that there was still plenty of gasoline. Dominic had left the car running — too much trouble to undo the hot-wired ignition. He shrugged and turned his attention to the trailer.

The blue tarp, loosened at the bow by Dominic, sagged over the companionway. Pierre lifted it. The beam of his flashlight disclosed nothing. He started down the steps. Dawg started an excited bark that turned into a high pitched howl. Pierre froze.

His light momentarily picked up the standing figure of an old woman. In her hand was something that looked remarkably like a silver gun barrel. Pierre's feet finally heard his brain, and he fled to the bow and vaulted to the ground. He leaped into the front seat of his car beside the startled Dominic, and pulled out of the park, spewing gravel behind him.

And in the Sinkerswim, Grandma stood unsteadily, grasping her empty bottle of nerve tonic, and shouting: "Elliott? Elliott? Goddammit, is that you, Elliott?"

She concluded that Elliott was out of earshot, and turned her attention to Dawg.

She released him from his harness. Dawg trotted through the cabin to the stern and hopped onto the grass, hoping to find the right spot immediately.

Grandma wondered vaguely how she had gotten into the cabin and where everyone had gone. She found a light switch. That was better. What cheered her even more was the sight of her own suitcase, lashed to the top bunk. She wormed it out of its bindings, opened it, rummaged around until she found her hidden quart of vodka and happily

refilled her nerve tonic bottle. At least, she thought, somebody had the foresight to put my purse to bed with me.

Dawg yapped before she had a chance to steady her nerves from the bottle.

"Jump up here, you flop-eared idiot," she commanded.

Surprisingly, Dawg made it on the first try. Grandma sniffed the night air, filled with pine fragrance and exhaust fumes. That idiot Elliott had gone off and left the motor running, she figured.

She lowered her wiry frame to the ground and went to the car. Nice and warm inside, she noted. She got into the driver's seat and fumbled around for the key. There was none.

"Well, the hell with it," Grandma said. "Let's go home."

She put the car in gear and jerkily pulled onto the county road.

Car and trailer rolled along unsteadily, sometimes with all wheels on the pavement and sometimes not, into the night. Dawg, released from his shackles, raised a joyous voice to the moon. Ignoring a traffic sign, Grandma turned right on Highway 41 and headed south.

#### A HALF AN HOUR LATER, THE SHERIFF'S PHONE RANG.

Deputy Boyd, who had been called into the office to make a written report in the Finch case, answered.

"Say, sheriff," came a voice, "I'm not going to give you my name, but a boat just went through town, right down Main Street, with a dog drivin' it. Hilton Junction. That's right — south on 41. Sure, a couple of us guys at the bar seen it."

Boyd hung up. That's all I need, he told himself, a bunch of drunks seeing a dog driving a boat . . . wait a minute! Boyd grabbed for the transmitter microphone.

The sudden activity across the hall awakened Elliott Finch, who had been dozing in a cell. He nudged Madge. The children slept soundly in the next cell.

"Do you have anything, officer?" Elliott said.

"I don't know about your car and Mrs. Higgins," Boyd replied, "but we may have a line on your dog and your boat."

"Poor mama!" Madge sobbed.

TWO MILES SOUTH OF HILTON JUNCTION, THE RIGHT FRONT tire of Pierre Nord's vehicle blew out, and with difficulty Pierre brought it to a stop on the shoulder of Highway 41.

"Now what?" asked Dominic.

"You will find that changing it is no problem at all," said Pierre.

"The spare and the jack are in the trunk. I will hold the flashlight for you."

Dominic muttered something, but he was unable to think of a better plan. He got out, still muttering, and followed Pierre's instructions. They had some trouble with the accursed jack that kept sliding down instead of up, but eventually Pierre's Olds was hoisted at a rakish angle, like some beast with a thorn in its paw.

Removing the wheel was another problem. Pierre finally discerned that the wheel could not be removed if it insisted on turning every time the lug wrench was twisted. Dominic put the jack in reverse until the wheel was grounded. Things went better.

An eerie howl pierced the darkness, a primordial sound drifting down the highway. Dominic could feel the hair on his neck rising. He had heard that bugling before, and he hastened his efforts. But they weren't enough. The howl, repeated, seemed to be getting louder and closer.

As, indeed, it was. Dawg, atop the cabin of Sinkerswim, was serenading the moon while Grandma tried to keep an even course in the darkness.

The blinking trouble lights of Pierre's car came into view, and Grandma, supposing that she was approaching a traffic signal of some variety, applied the brakes. The car slewed slightly and the trailer began wagging, which made the footing for Dawg precarious. He shut up and dug in.

Grandma slewed once more to avoid Pierre's car. The trailer wagged to the right, and the side of Sinkerswim gently nudged Pierre's car into the ditch. Grandma rolled to a halt to see what idiot had run into her. Elliott would not be pleased.

Pierre and Dominic, crouching in the ditch, did their best to make sense out of what had happened. But new troubles were coming with a new howl — a siren atop a State Patrol car bearing down on the scene. It stopped behind Sinkerswim. From its top came a voice:

"Step out of the car with your hands in the air."

Grandma was looking for her nerve tonic, and shouted back: "Hold your horses! I'm busy!"

The officer put in a call for reinforcements, and was glad that he had when his spotlight picked out two more criminals trying to hide behind an overturned Olds.

"You! In the ditch! Walk back here with your hands on your head! Easy, now!"

Dominic and Pierre submitted, somewhat gratefully, to arrest.

"There is a howling madman in that car, officer," Dominic volun-

teered. "He's trying to kill us."

"Just get in the back seat and stay out of the way," the officer said. "If those cuffs are too tight, tell me about it in an hour or two."

Being a prudent man, the officer decided to defer the madman's arrest until help came. Which it did fifteen minutes later. Two squads, one driven by Deputy Boyd.

The three surrounded Elliott's car.

"All right," boomed Boyd, "get out of that car with your hands up!"

"If thash you, Elliott," Grandma screeched, "go shase y'self." She had found her nerve tonic and her lipstick.

The officers conferred.

"This is your last warning!" Boyd shouted. "You've got five minutes. Then we start shooting."

Nothing came from Grandma, who now was stretched on the seat, oblivious to the conversation. Dawg decided he had done enough listening, and raised a howl. Boyd jumped, then saw the beagle on the deck. "Shut up!" he said, and Dawg, happy that someone finally was in control, did.

Boyd glanced at his watch.

"Five minutes must be up," he said. "I'll put a round through the windshield."

He aimed high and fired. A smallish hole with spidery cracks around it appeared on the top of the curved glass. There was no movement inside the car.

"Cover me," Boyd rasped. "I'm going to open the door."

Boyd snatched open the door and crouched behind it. Still no activity. He shined his light on the seat and gasped.

"It's an old woman! And I killed her! Right between the eyes!"

"Let me see," said the state patrolman. He leaned over Grandma.

"For one thing," he said, "you didn't shoot her. That's lipstick on her forehead. For another, she may be dead drunk, but she's not dead. Faint carotid pulse. Somebody check the boat for that body back there. I'll see if there's an I.D. on this one."

Relieved, Boyd went back and searched the boat.

"Nothing dead back there but a bottle of vodka," he reported. "Did you find any identification?"

"Yup. This one is Jane Higgins."

"Kee-rist! She's supposed to be dead! What about those other two?"

"I called in the plates. You better take them, the dog and Mary Poppins into town. Lock 'em all up."

"You're right," said Boyd. "Let the sheriff figure it out. Huber can stay here with the used car lot."

GEORGE HAYLES GOT UP FROM HIS DESK AND STRETCHED. IT was bad enough being sheriff all day, seven days a week, but it was too much when you had to get up in the middle of the night to keep the peace.

He walked across the corridor to cell No. 1 where Elliott Finch was gently snoring.

"Mr. Finch," said the sheriff, "can you hear me?"

Elliott stirred and mumbled. Madge was awake at once.

"Look, folks. We're going to have to move you to my house for the rest of the night. We got cash customers coming."

"Did you find our car?" Madge asked.

"Yup," said Hayles. "Car, boat, dog and three suspects."

"And my mother? Mrs. Higgins?"

"She's one of the suspects."

"You mean, she's . . . she's . . . ?"

"Yes, Mrs. Finch," Hayles said. "Mrs. Higgins, I am told, has a drinking problem. One other thing: Does your mother know how to hot-wire a vehicle?"

The children were moved to the sheriff's house. Madge and Elliott decided to wait for Grandma to be booked before they tried to get back to sleep.

There wasn't much of a wait. Boyd brought in Pierre and Dominic Nord, and while the sheriff was booking them, returned with Grandma, who had a decided list.

But she was awake.

"Did you bring my purse, officer? I need my nerve tonic. Why are you bringing me here? Oho, there's Elliott. You want me to bail him out, right? Madge! Why have they got you? Drafty in here. Isn't there any heat?"

Boyd got her planted on a bench in the sheriff's office. Her gaze eventually took in Pierre and Dominic.

"Well, I swear!" she said. "You've caught those two peeping Toms that were trying to assault me after my nap!"

Hayles sighed. It was going to be a long night.

THE SUN WAS COMING UP WHEN HAYLES CALLED ELLIOTT into his office.

"There's no need for you folks to stick around any longer," Hayles said. "We'll need your mother-in-law again to testify against the Nord

brothers. They were driving a stolen car and had stolen yours — along with your boat, trailer, dog and mother-in-law — while you were eating. We think they're involved in other boat and vehicle thefts."

"We could just continue on up to the cottage, then?"

"Well, you could," said Hayles. "But your boat won't be much good to you. Looks like you took a torpedo starboard."

"My new boat?"

"And Mr. Finch. Don't let your mother-in-law drive."

"I don't. Her license has been revoked."

"I know," Hayles said. "And there are a few other things we can charge her with. We'll go as easy as we can, considering her part in the apprehension of the Nords. And be careful with your own driving."

"What do you mean, sheriff? I've never had a ticket in my life."

"I only meant that there's a hole in your windshield."

"And get that fixed before we leave for home, Elliott," Grandma piped up. "You know how I hate drafts." ●

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13 THRILL-CHAPTERS!

*"I've got your mother out here, kid," the man said,  
"and if you don't come out of that bathroom I'm going to  
start cutting her up!"*

# Willie Meets The Man

by MICHAEL SCOTT CAIN

AS WILLIE CLOSED THE DOOR BEHIND HIM AND STEPPED INTO the hall, Mr. Harvey came out of his apartment. He staggered slightly and looked a little confused, as though he weren't quite sure where he was. When he saw Willie, he tried to straighten up.

"Good evening, Willie," he said, nodding his head formally.

Shaking his fist, Willie shouted, "Go away, you old drunk. Leave me alone."

He scampered down the stairs and out of the building, holding the key he wore on a string around his neck so it wouldn't bounce on his chest. The evening was clear and warm and Willie felt good. He waved to Mrs. Holly and ran down the street toward McDonald's.

Then he saw the man.

WILLIE NOTICED HIM BECAUSE THE MAN WALKED FUNNY, took each step slowly and deliberately, as if he were trying to slip up on somebody. Though he knew he ought to just get on down to McDonald's, get his dinner, and hurry on back home the way he did every night when his mother worked, Willie couldn't resist following the man up the block. The funny way the guy walked and the way he kept look-

ing around as though he wanted to be sure nobody was watching him told Willie there was an adventure here. And he was up for an adventure.

If any of his mother's friends had been around, they would have told him to go home; he knew that. They all figured he was just a little kid who didn't have any business being on the street by himself. But that wasn't fair. Just because he was eight years old didn't mean he wasn't tough. He'd taken care of himself and his mother for a long time now, so if he wanted to follow some funny looking man, what was the problem?

When the man turned onto Collingwood Street, Willie went along. He tried to memorize everything the man did so he'd be able to tell his mother about it over breakfast tomorrow morning; she liked it when he had adventures to share with her.

The man was short and kind of pudgy, as though he didn't get any exercise at all. He wore faded jeans, tennis shoes, and a windbreaker, just like Willie did, and he was bald. When he stopped in the middle of the block, Willie leaned against a building, pressing himself close so the guy wouldn't see him. Across the street, a man in a suit was locking his car. The man in jeans slipped quietly over to the same side of the street. Willie knew something was going to happen now.

Coming up quietly behind the man in the suit, the bald guy took a knife from him pocket and slammed it quickly into the other man's back. The man in the suit collapsed against the side of his car and slid down into the street. Willie almost screamed. He wanted to run away but, as he saw the bald man stab the other one again, he froze. It was too horrible to look away from.

The bald man rolled his victim over and pulled his billfold out of his coat pocket. Taking the money from it, he tossed the billfold onto the fallen man's chest.

As he tucked the money into his pocket, he saw Willie. Their eyes met and Willie felt the strength of his gaze, felt the fierce concentration of something he didn't understand burn through him, holding him in place.

"Hey, kid," the man said, "come here."

His face was dark, mean; his thick eyebrows met in the middle. Willie broke and ran.

If he made it home, he told himself, hearing footsteps behind him, if he made it home he'd never go off on an adventure again, if he lived to be a thousand he'd never do anything like this again. He'd go out and get his dinner and come straight home, just like his mother wanted him to.

He ran faster, his heart pumping, his side starting to hurt, and even though he couldn't hear the footsteps anymore, he put on an extra burst of speed when he saw his building. He ran for everything he was worth, bursting into the lobby, almost tripping as he went up the steps. His hand shook as he unlocked the door.

Sides hurting, lungs burning as he fought for breath, he crouched next to the curtain, peeking out the window. For a long time he watched the street, but he didn't see the man.

Instead of watching TV that night, he sat as quietly as he could on the couch, keeping his eye on the lock, waiting for the sound of his mother's key. Every once in a while, he'd hide behind the curtains and scan the street through the window. The man never showed up.

When he finally fell asleep on the couch, he didn't dream.

"HEY, WILLIE," HIS MOTHER SAID WHEN HE CAME INTO breakfast, "You know I had to carry you to bed last night? You fell asleep on the couch."

"Mom . . ."

She slid his Captain Crunch across the table to him and poured herself some coffee. "Thing is, you're getting too big for that. You're as big as a moose."

"Listen, Mom?"

"In a minute, Willie. I've got something important to tell you."

He poured milk on his cereal. The steady hum of the refrigerator and the squeak of his chair on the linoleum floor made him feel better. The refrigerator always made noise and in this tiny apartment; it could drive you crazy, but today it sounded good.

"What, Mom?"

"You know how much I love you?"

Whenever she was going to give him an order, she told him how much she loved him, how important he was, how much she depended on him since his daddy had gone away, how it was just the two of them now and if anything ever happened to him . . .

" . . . so when you go out at night, you get dinner and come straight home, you hear me?" She brushed a few strands of hair away from her face. "If I ever hear of you doing anything else, I'll skin you alive."

"Listen, Mom . . ."

"Willie, I'm not kidding. It's dangerous out there. A man got killed last night, not six blocks from here."

"Killed?"

"That's right. So I'm telling you, buddy, if I ever hear of you run-

ning those streets, you're in big trouble. I mean it."

He ought to tell her about the man, but if he did she'd skin him alive. Usually he could talk her out of a whipping, but when she really got mad, she could do a job on him that he'd feel for days. And she'd really freak if she found out he'd already disobeyed her.

Still though, if the man in the suit was dead, she should know about his being there. But he held back; her face stopped him. Her flesh was tight and she had that little jerking motion in the corner of her mouth that she always got when she was worried or upset. He remembered that twitch from the time when his daddy had first left. He'd been too little to do anything for her then, but he was older now, big and tough.

"OK, Mom."

"Good boy."

She hugged him. She was all bones and a powdery smell. He liked it a lot.

"You get ready for school now."

**WHEN THE BELL RANG, WILLIE, JACK, AND BOBBY BURST** through the door, breaking out into the warm afternoon a full five steps ahead of the other kids.

"I'm going out long, Bobby." Willie ran through the school yard, waving his arms over his head, "Hit me with a long one!"

The football spiraled through the air and he followed it with his eyes as he loped along, positioning himself perfectly. In the pocket, he thought, can't miss. As he reached for the ball, he saw the man in jeans leaning against a parking meter on the other side of the street.

The ball fell to the ground as Willie turned and ran as though the devil was after him.

**"MOMMA, CAN'T YOU STAY HOME TONIGHT?"**

Reaching behind her to zip up her uniform, she said, "On Friday night? Are you kidding?"

"Can't Mr. Wagner get somebody else?"

"That's not the point." She scraped at her fingernails with an emory board, frowning, "You know Friday's a big tip night. And we need the money, baby."

"I ain't a baby."

"Don't say 'ain't.'"

"Well, anyway — can't you stay home? Just this once?"

She roughed up his hair. "What's the matter? You getting a little lonely?"

"Well . . ."

"Look, Willie, I miss you too. But we've got to have the money. Besides, it wouldn't be fair to Mr. Wagner to call in now. Tell you what: I'll try to get home early, before you go to sleep. And remember, straight to McDonald's and straight home. I don't want you on those streets."

"Maybe I'll just make dinner here."

"They're coming to fix the stove on Monday. *Then* you can make dinner here. But until that thing's fixed I don't want you touching it. You get your dinner out."

"OK, Mom."

"Oh, and Willie?"

"Yeah?"

"I hear you were rude to Mr. Harvey again. I want you to stop that."

"He tell you about that?"

"Never mind where I heard about it. You just stop it."

"Aw, he's just an old drunk."

"He's had some bad luck, just like we have. So don't you be mean to him."

"All right."

She kissed him. "See you later, then."

When the door closed behind her, he flinched.

HE WAS USED TO HOW SMALL THE APARTMENT WAS, BUT tonight it felt even tinier, almost as though it meant to close in on him and crush him, the way those walls did in horror movies. He tried watching TV but couldn't get into it and every comic book he owned had become too familiar to him, so he sat on the couch absently kicking the leg of the coffee table.

Finally he got out his model cars. Arranging them on the floor, he played race for a while, but that wasn't making it either. Might as well go for an early dinner, he thought, and as he walked to the kitchen to get his money out of the coffee can, he glanced out the window. The bald man leaned against the wall of the drug store, looking up this way. Willie jumped back, but knew he was too late. The man had seen him.

Just to be sure — after all, he'd jumped away pretty quickly and he was kind of hard to see when he was moving real fast — he checked again. The man was crossing the street, his eyes on Willie's window. Willie started for the door, but stopped suddenly; he'd never be able to make it out of the building before the guy got here. Slamming the door shut, he tried to think of a place to hide, but there wasn't one; this apartment wasn't big enough to hide in. As he heard footsteps coming up the stairs, he ran and locked himself in the bathroom.

The steps were loud on the apartment floor; Willie gasped: he'd forgotten to lock the front door. Stupid, he said, stupid. You always lock the door. That's the first thing you do.

He'd stay in here, that's what he'd do. He'd stay in here and the guy'd think he'd gone out and would leave.

"Hey, kid?"

**WILLIE SQUEEZED HIS EYES SHUT AND TRIED TO BREATHE** very quietly. If he tried real hard, he could breathe so quietly it would hardly be like breathing at all. The man would never know he was here.

"You and me got to talk, kid."

The man walked through the apartment. The walls seemed to shake with each step.

"Come on, kid. Answer me. I know you're in here."

When the footsteps stopped in front of the bathroom door, Willie still heard them in his head. He was doing pretty good, but you could still tell this was breathing, so he tried a little harder.

"You're in there, aren't you, kid?"

Willie backed away slowly until he felt the cold tile wall touch his back. It was so smooth and cold that it felt like a snake.

"Answer me, kid. I know you're in there."

No more mistakes. You didn't lock the door and that was a bad mistake, but it'll be all right if you don't make any more mistakes.

He'd open the door real fast, run right past the guy and be out the door so quick the guy'd think he was Superman or something. That's what he'd do. And when he got outside, he'd go straight for the cops.

"Look, kid, I'm not going to hurt you. It's just we got to talk. You know I wouldn't hurt a little kid."

You hurt that man. You killed him.

"That guy you saw me with, well, he was a bad guy. I had to take him out. It's my job. I'm kind of a cop. And I just came over here to make sure you're all right. So you can come out now."

Willie took two steps forward and reached for the door handle. But he couldn't just go flying out of here. That was stupid. The guy was a lot bigger than he was; he'd be all over Wille before he was halfway across the room. Wishing his mother was home, he fingered his key.

"Thing is, kid, I'm not going to hurt you, but I got to know you're not going to say anything. Look, all you got to do is come out here and tell me you're not going to say anything to anybody and I'll go away. I promise. But I got to see you say it, so I'll know I can believe you."

That made sense. All he had to do was promise and he could do that because he hadn't told his mother, had he? And if he wasn't going to

tell her, he sure wouldn't tell anybody else. The man was telling the truth; he wouldn't hurt a kid, especially if he was a kind of a cop.

SLOWLY, MOVING AS THOUGH HE WERE CAUGHT IN A THICK fog, he started toward the door. Tears swelled in his eyes and he fought them back, but he couldn't catch them in time and suddenly he couldn't keep from crying like some dumb baby, so he stopped because he couldn't let the man see him crying, see him with his dumb face all covered with tears. Willie was a man, he was tough, and tough people might have to cry every once in a while, but they didn't let other people see it. He'd have to wait, that's all. When he got himself under control, he'd go out.

The door rattled as though the man were trying to break it down. "Hey, kid, I'm getting tired of this. You come out of there right now!"

"You go away!" Willie screamed through his tears. "You ain't a cop. You're bad. Go away."

He sobbed. Another mistake. He shouldn't have talked, because now the man knew for sure he was in here and he knew Willie was afraid. He'd break the door down and then Willie would be dead.

The man was quiet for a long time. Willie wondered what he was up to. The silence seemed to go on forever.

"Hey, kid?"

He waited.

"I've got your mother out here."

"You do not!" His words bounced off of tile walls.

"She's tied up and if you don't come out I'm going to start hurting her."

His mother was still at work. He knew that, knew it as well as he knew his own address. But she'd said she was going to come home early and she always did what she said she would, she'd never break a promise, so maybe she came home and the guy grabbed her when she came in the door. Maybe she was out there. He knew she wasn't, but maybe she was.

"I'm going to count to five, kid. If you ain't out here by five, I'm going to start cutting her up."

Willie wiped tears from his eyes.

"One."

He couldn't let his mother get hurt. If he did, then he was just like his father — a coward who ran away when it got tough.

"Two."

He wasn't like his father; he refused to be like his father.

"Three."

But he'd need something to hurt the man with. He looked through the medicine chest. Nothing. His mother kept all the razors and stuff somewhere else so he couldn't hurt himself with them.

"Four."

The sewing box under the sink. She was always giving him a hard time about using her scissors and not putting them back in the sewing box. He got out the box and dug frantically, throwing thread and patterns all over the floor, not caring if he made a mess. The scissors were on the bottom. They didn't feel very heavy in his hands.

"Five."

He couldn't have her thinking he was like his father. She wasn't out there, he knew, but if she was, if there was any way possible that she was, he couldn't have her thinking he wasn't there to help when it got rough.

JERKING THE DOOR OPEN, HE YELLED AS LOUD AS HE COULD and charged into the room, scissors held out in front of him. He collided with the man and bounced off, hitting the floor hard, hurting his elbow. Tears flooded his face; he was dead now, he was lying on the floor and could hear the man moving and he didn't even have his scissors anymore. The bald man was going to start stabbing him and he'd never be alive again. He tried to scramble away, tried to get up for another try at the bald man, but knew he was dead for sure.

He heard the man coming for him. Rolling over, he scurried away, bumping a chair as he crawled.

"You hurt me, kid."

There was a thick line of blood on the man's arm. Willie must have scratched him with the scissors. The man pulled out his knife.

"You shouldn't have done that, kid. I'm going to get you good for that."

Willie made it to his feet and broke for the front door. As his hand closed on the knob, the man grabbed him by the shoulders and threw him backwards. His chest hit the coffee table, knocking it over. He lay on the floor, gasping, the man's feet in front of his face.

As the man reached down for him, he screamed as loud as he could. The sound echoed off the walls and seemed to come from inside his head.

"Shut up, kid." The man's fingers closed on his shoulder.

Willie screamed again when he saw the knife.

As the knife neared his face, he heard the door open. "Willie?" Mr. Harvey said, "Are you all right?"

Mr. Harvey was drunk. He was barefooted and his shirt was unbuttoned. His eyes drooped, seemed to have trouble focussing.

"Get out of here!" the bald man yelled.

Harvey's eyes widened when he saw Willie on the floor, the knife in the man's hands. Pointing to the man, he said, "Leave that boy alone." He drew himself up proudly. "You do not dare hurt that boy."

"I said get out of here." The man took a step forward, holding the knife out.

Willie scurried behind the couch as Harvey rushed the bald man. Peeking around the couch, Willie saw the bald man throw himself forward onto Mr. Harvey, his momentum carrying them through the door into the hall. Closing his eyes, Willie listened to the scuffle outside. He heard a scream and a loud crash as someone thumped down the stairs. Then footsteps came back into the room.

Willie squeezed his eyes shut and waited.

"It's all right now, Willie," Mr. Harvey said. "He won't hurt you."

Willie opened his eyes. Mr. Harvey wobbled drunkenly on his feet, his face dripping with sweat, his hair messed up. His eyes were wide and stared beyond Willie. He reached out and held the back of the couch for support. Willie saw the knife sticking out of his stomach.

"Mr. Harvey," he cried, "you're hurt."

Mr. Harvey looked down at the knife. "So it seems," he said and collapsed.

TWO DETECTIVES WERE IN THE ROOM WITH WILLIE WHEN his mother came home. Mr. Harvey's body was covered with a blanket. Willie sat next to it, holding one of Mr. Harvey's hands in his.

"Willie," one of the detectives said, "we've got to take him down now. You have to let go."

"You leave him alone," Willie said.

"Look, Willie. We'll take care of him."

"He's my friend and he saved me, so you just leave him alone."

"Willie?" his mother said, "Are you all right?"

Willie pulled Mr. Harvey's hand closer, gripped it with both of his own. "A man tried to hurt me, Momma, and Mr. Harvey saved me."

"That's right, mam," one of the detectives said. "He must've heard the noise and come to take a look. Somehow he wrestled the assailant out of the room and threw him down the stairs. He broke the guy's neck." He shook his head. "It was an amazing thing for an old drunk to do."

"You stop talking like that!" Willie shouted. "He's not a drunk. He's my friend."

*There was a deep growling, and I heard the beast coming for me. I fired my gun, but the bullets didn't stop it!*

# The Frozen Dog

by MICHAEL FOWLER

MY NAME IS CHEMICALS. JOE CHEMICALS. I'M A POLICE detective. I am real, useful, precise, organic, and relative. I always vote Republican.

It was six o'clock in the morning. Eleven degrees below zero with crunchy snow on the ground. I was on the north side of town, the low rent district. I was making my way to Mike's Diner to meet my occasional partner O'Rourke, when I came across a frozen dog. It was on its side in the snow. I'd have said it was a pup, breed boxer. Since it was beside the street, I guessed a car had hit it in the night, and it had frozen before dawn. It looked stiff as a running board.

O'Rourke expressed unusual interest in the dog. As he shoveled in a plate of scrambled eggs laced with Tabasco sauce, he said: "Frozen dog? Is it dead?"

"Naw," I said. "Just frozen. Probably it's out there bitin' somebody."

"OK, OK. No need to wax sarcastic." And if I didn't know O'Rourke to be the most insensitive soul alive, I'd have sworn he was embarrassed by his stupid remark. "So what kind of dog is it?" He belched, and poured boiling coffee down his maw.

"Looks like a boxer pup. Only stockier. A little more muscular. Probably a car got it."

"Sounds like a pit pup to me."

"You mean a fighter."

"Yeah. I wouldn't be surprised if there were pit fights around here. We busted a ring of dog owners about a year back, if I recall, for that very thing. Right in this cheesy neighborhood. And probably your pup is a loser, not a run-over."

"Maybe," I said. "Gimme two, waitress, over easy. Yeah, and toast and coffee."

She was a new girl at Mike's, that waitress. A honey blonde I hadn't seen before. Not bad —

"Hey, c'mon," said O'Rourke. "Let's go check the dog for marks. Should be easy to tell how it died."

"Hey, relax. The dog's not going anywhere. It's frozen, remember? Let me get some breakfast first. Besides, I haven't introduced myself to that blonde waitress yet."

"C'mon, Chemicals. You wanna bust this fight ring or not?"

"OK, OK. Waitress, hold those eggs."

**BACK WHERE THE FROZEN DOG SHOULD HAVE BEEN**  
O'Rourke and I found only some crying schoolchildren standing in the snow. And one irate father.

"Look here," said the father. "Are you two the animal authorities? Well, I want to report a frozen dog running around here and upsetting these children with its coldness. The thing is so cold that when some of the kids patted it on the head it made them sick to their stomachs. Isn't there something you can do? For a frozen animal to be on the loose is really a dangerous state of affairs! And how are these kids supposed to get to school with a thing like that chilling them?"

A small girl stepped forward.

"I seen the dog, mister," she said to me. "He was sleepin' right here on the ground, and then he got up to play. I thought he was Brownie, but he was colder than Brownie. He tried to get the baloney sandwich out of my lunchbox, but I wouldn't let him. Then he ran off that way."

She pointed in the direction the dog had run off. O'Rourke and I looked at each other. "We'll see what we can do, honey," I said to the little girl. O'Rourke nodded his head confidently at the father. The father glared back. Clearly, he didn't share O'Rourke's confidence.

**O'ROURKE GOT CALLED DOWNTOWN TO SEE ABOUT A GRAND**  
theft, auto, and suddenly I was on my own. His parting words to me

were: "Find that dog and stick to it. When you see where it goes, or who picks it up, you'll have your fight ring. And listen don't worry too much about the dog being frozen. I've seen stranger things in my day. Well, good luck, old buddy." Thanks, O'Rourke. I hadn't seen stranger things in *my* day, and I needed it.

On a hunch I called on Sid "Tender" Loins, the neighborhood butcher and proprietor of Loin's Meat Shop. If there was one place on the north side a dog would go, a dog so hungry it would stoop to a baloney sandwich, it was Loin's. And Loins was kind to animals, too. That is, if having a bird feeder out back of your store meant anything.

A little bell sounded when I went in the door. A fat, balding sexagenarian wearing a coagulated apron and hefting a meat cleaver stood behind a glass case and regarded me over a bank of raw hamburger. He seemed to be thinking how much he could charge for sliced pig, if pig meant detective.

"You Chemicals?" he said rubbing his thumb across the cleaver's edge.

"Completely," I replied.

"Thought I recognized you. You're the flatfoot gave me a parking ticket back in July 1963."

"Hope there's no hard feelings."

"None on my side. Look, Chemicals, I'm a busy man. I've got a ton of pork to chop. What's on your mind?"

"It's detective Chemicals now, Loins, and I'll come straight to the point. There's a frozen dog on the loose in this vicinity, a pit pup, and I'm looking for it. If my suspicions are right, you've seen it."

"A pit pup? You mean one of them fighters?"

"That's exactly what I mean."

"But how can a frozen fighter be on the loose? If a dog is frozen, it's dead, ain't it? You wouldn't be tryin' to fool an old butcher, would you, detective?"

"It's no joke, Loins. The dog is both frozen and alive and, if my theory is correct, it's looking for a well-balanced meal of beef without any cereal filler."

"Well, I ain't seen it. I ain't seen no kind of frozen dog in here, dead or alive. All I seen in here is frozen fish."

"C'mon, Loins." I walked over to where I had spied a small mound of dog dirt on the floor, dog dirt frozen as hard as marble — I knew because I kicked it a little. "What's this, then — the down payment on a rib roast?"

Loins looked at the floor with disgust. "Why that mangy —! All right, all right. The dog blew in here about six-fifteen this morning,

right after I got here myself. It stood over there in the corner and didn't move a muscle. I *thought* it didn't move a muscle. It was frozen all right, like a little statue. Made me shiver just to see it. But when I told it I wasn't giving away any free meat, it blew out again. That's the last I saw of it, so help me."

"You got a back room here, don't you, Loins?"

"Course I got a back room. Whadaya think — I got only one room here?"

"How about letting me take a look at it."

"Sure, I'll open it up. But mind telling me what you're looking for?"

"Oh, let's say a dogfight."

"Well, you've come to the wrong place, friend. This is my refrigeration room. Ain't nothin' in it but a couple of cows."

I looked in, and it was just as Loins said. There were only a couple of cows inside. They looked awfully cold.

"OK, Loins," I said making the bell ring again on my way out to the street. "Looks like your nose is clean, which is more than I can say for your apron. I'll be in touch."

NEXT STOP WAS COUNTY GENERAL. I'D JUST RECEIVED WORD that O'Rourke was holed up there in a semiprivate room suffering from frostbite, chilblains, and hydrophobia — all after an entanglement with a frozen dog. Ironically, it was getting quite a bit warmer out, and I left my hat and gloves in the car.

"O'Rourke, you crazy fool. What happened?"

I stood looking down at him in bed.

"Chemicals? Is that you, Chemicals?" O'Rourke stirred under a blanket. "I can't see so good with this hydrophobia."

"Take it easy, O'Rourke. That's just some sleeping shades you have on."

"Oh. Then I'm all right?"

"The nurse says you'll be fine. Now tell me how it happened."

"Well, that grand theft, auto, turned out to be nothing. Just a bunch of spoiled upper-middle-class teenagers out on a joy ride. Their parents got the charges quashed, but I had their algebra teachers lower their grades to C+, just bad enough to blow Princeton for them."

"Serves them right, the bounders. But the dog, O'Rourke. Tell me about the dog."

"I'm comin' to that. So with the matter of the car disposed of, I came back uptown to help you find that pit pup. That's when it happened."

I gripped his siderails. "What happened, O'Rourke?"

"It got me, Chemicals. It got me bad. I wanted to pick up its trail right where I had dropped it, at Mike's Diner. Besides, I'd left my hat there. I parked down the street from the place and started to walk toward it. I hadn't gone ten paces when it came at me from out of a snowdrift, the coldest mutt I ever imagined. It ran without moving its legs, and bit without moving its jaws. That's how frozen it was! Stiff as stone! And when it was done with me it skidded away across the snow on its side, powered by I don't know what. What a dreadful experience!"

"Easy, O'Rourke. Jeez, you used to be so insensitive."

"No more, buddy. After being mauled by that frigid monster, I'm a mass of jangled nerves. By the way, I did get a close look at the thing. It's a pit pup, all right, the very breed. And it's got tooth and claw marks all over it, a few of them mine. I'm positive it died in a fight."

"Thanks, O'Rourke. You've been a big help. I'll get over to Mike's Diner right away. Could be that dog's looking for someone there."

"One more thing, Chemicals."

"Yes?"

"Have you heard the latest weather report? There's a warm front moving into this area right this minute, practically a heat wave. In a couple of hours it's going to be 50 degrees. Already it's in the high 30's. That dog of yours is going to thaw out fast. If I were you I'd look for a dog of slush instead of a frozen dog. And Chemicals?"

"I hear you."

"On your way out tell the nurse to bring me an extra blanket. I'm freezing in here."

O'ROURKE WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE WEATHER. SUDDENLY everything was melting and dripping, and it looked as though it was getting ready to rain. That meant I had to hurry. If the frozen dog was now a dog of slush, as O'Rourke predicted, then my only clue to the whereabouts of the fight ring was about to dissolve and flow down the gutter. I had to find it before that happened.

I arrived at Mike's around noon. The usual lunch crush was there, and I was lucky to squeeze in at the counter. A waitress came over, the same honey blonde who took my breakfast order, but she gave no sign of recognizing me. I decided on coffee, just coffee, three cups of it, to keep me on my toes. While I waited for it, I located O'Rourke's hat on a peg on the wall. I lifted it off, folded it up and stuffed it in my coat pocket. O'Rourke'd be grateful I remembered it.

On my second cup of coffee I was witness to an unusual spectacle. A well-dressed middle-aged couple passed by me on their way to the

door, clearly upset over the service they had received.

"The nerve of these people," said the woman. "Imagine leaving your door wide open in winter so that any passing dog of slush can run in and shake its hair dry on you. If they think I'm paying for that kind of treatment, they're out of their minds. Come along, Herman."

"Absolutely, Margaret," said the man. "Fortunately for them that nice gentleman in the green necktie said we did *not* have to pay."

"Scuse me, folks," I said spinning around on my stool and stopping them cold. "I couldn't help overhearing that a dog of some sort ruined your meal. Can you describe the dog for me?"

"Why should we?" snapped the woman with an acid scowl. "What business is it of yours?"

"I'm the dogcatcher for this district, mam. I'd appreciate any help you could give me about a possibly dangerous stray."

She obviously had her doubts about my profession, but I could tell she was bursting to talk.

"Very well, if you insist. It was a small, brown, short-haired dog, rather stocky, composed entirely of slush."

"Composed entirely of slush, you say."

"Entirely," she said.

"Thoroughly," said the man.

"And we demand satisfaction," said the woman.

The two of them glared at me as though the whole peculiar business was somehow my fault.

"Well, thank you both," I said. "Thank you very much. You've been very helpful. And by the way, if you want a really good lunch sometime, try Ed's Chili Gourmet right down the street. They do a chili dog at Ed's that sits on your stomach like a smelter."

Exchanging looks of horror, they stepped outside.

I turned back to the counter and signaled my waitress. In my silkiest voice I asked her: "Sugar, is there a nice gentleman in a green necktie here named Mike?"

"You mean the boss?" she said ignoring my tone. "Sure, he's here."

"Tell him Joe Chemicals would like a word."

"You Chemicals?" she said.

"Just," I replied.

"Well, OK. But you'll have to wait till I drain an order of hash browns. It's noon, you know."

I nodded and smiled. As I remarked at breakfast, she was new to the place and didn't know me. Any of the regular waitresses could have told her that Joe Chemicals and Mike What's-his-name went back a

decade together. None of them would have kept me waiting a minute. Ah well, I thought, stirring sugar into my third cup of coffee. Give her time; she'll learn.

WHAT WITH ONE THING AND ANOTHER SHE DIDN'T GET around to relaying my message until I finished my coffee. But then Mike bobbed into view and she cornered him. I sat up expectantly. Mike was an overweight fellow of fifty with flaming red hair who always affected a green necktie, and each of us thought the world of the other. We just had trouble remembering each other's name. Strangely, though, Mike only shrugged his shoulders and shook his head at the waitress, and regarded me with a puzzled stare. I was no aficionado of pantomime, but it seemed Mike didn't know me from Nebuchadnezzar.

"Hey, Mike!" I shouted at last. "It's me, Chemicals!"

Mike came down the other side of the counter and stood opposite me. "Who?" he said.

"Mike, don't you recognize me?" I expostulated. "I've been eating here for ten years!"

"So, you must like it," he said. "Now tell me what I can do for you, mister. I'm very busy. It's noon, you know."

"I know. This won't take long. It's about that little run-in you had here with a dog of slush."

"Please!" he pleaded. "Keep your voice down! Need I remind you that this is a respectable, family-style restaurant you're in? You want my customers to think they're eating what a dog has been next to? Besides, what concern is it of yours?"

"I'm a cop," I said.

"So you're a cop," he said. "That makes it your affair that a dog of slush waltzes in here thirty minutes ago and shakes its ice water and hair into my customers' plates? What are you telling me, that I'm under arrest for that? You want to arrest someone, go arrest the dog."

"Maybe I will," I said. "And its owner, too. Wouldn't happen to know where they are, would you?"

"I know where the hound is. I kicked it out into the street myself, thirty minutes ago. My foot's still cold and wet from the ordeal."

"Know where it went after that?"

"How do I know? Maybe home to lick its wounds. It lost a lot of water."

"Got a back room here?"

"You been coming in here ten years, you say. You ever seen a back room?"

"Well, no."

"You ever seen an upstairs room?"

"No."

"You ever seen a storage basement?"

"No."

"Would you like to?"

"Would I like to what?"

"See a storage basement. I got one of those."

"That depends. Is it big enough to hold dogfights in?"

"It's big enough to hold rhino fights in. But the only thing alive down there is my uncle Larry's polka band."

"Your uncle Larry's what?"

"Polka band. Whatsamatter, you hard of hearing or something? I'm talking about an amateur musical organization my uncle Larry is involved in. I let them practice here noons so their noise don't disturb nobody. Besides, they like to play down there among the stored pretzels and barrels of lager. Doing that lends a certain oom-pa-pa to the music, Larry says."

"I better check this out. Otherwise I don't believe what my ears are telling me."

He led me down some steps to his basement and I checked it out. It was just as he said: a group of afflicted adults in lederhosen and Alpine hats playing "In Heaven There Is No Beer" on brass instruments and accordions — a strange choice of song, I thought, since there were barrels of beer all over the place. Of course this wasn't heaven. But then neither was it, to all appearances, a dogfight.

"OK, Mike," I said climbing back up the steps. "Looks like you're on the level, which is more than I can say for these steps. Catch you later."

BY NOW IT MUST HAVE BEEN FIFTY DEGREES OUTSIDE. THE sidewalks were like strips of soup. I thought again of the dog. I wondered if it was getting desperate, on account of the temperature. Meaner, maybe, the more it melted. Did it sense it had only a short time to live? Or could it go on indefinitely as slush, or even as water? A dog of steam — how would I handle a dog of steam? On the other hand, what if it had found a place to keep cold, and even refreeze itself? I didn't know what to think.

I sat behind the wheel of my car and lit a cigarette. For some reason that only my subconscious knew, I decided to go back to Loins'. Loins had to be involved. Why him? Because I sensed that beneath his bloody exterior there lurked a true degenerate, a real piece of human

filth. Besides, he had reminded me that I used to hand out parking tickets. A man that callous had to be guilty.

In setting out I again left my hat and gloves in the car, and also my coat. I took my revolver, slipping it into the side pocket of my jacket. Perhaps this return visit to Loins was a waste of time, but I wanted to be prepared. No dog, frozen or slushy, was going to put *me* in the hospital. And that went for butchers, too.

AT LOIN'S I FOUND A CLOSED SIGN IN THE WINDOW AND THE lights off inside. That didn't smell right to me, not at one o'clock in the afternoon. Suppose I needed a tongue sandwich on rye, with a side order of pickles? I knocked repeatedly on the door until finally I discerned some movement within. Loins himself opened the door wide enough to stick his head out.

"Whatsamatter, detective?" he said. "The sign not printed in your language? It says 'Closed.' Come back tomorrow."

Loins tried to shut the door, but I wedged my foot in it and talked fast.

"Listen, Loins, I got to have a tongue sandwich on rye! And maybe a nice dill pickle! Really, I'm famished! I'm almost ready to faint! OK, skip the pickle! I'll just have the sandwich! And I'll leave right after I eat!"

But Loins wasn't buying that, and I had to force my way in. By pressing my shoulder to the door, I opened it against fierce resistance from the butcher, who retreated behind his glass case as I entered. I saw him cowering back there in the shadows.

"Look, cop," he said, "whadayou want here? I got rights, you know. When I say my shop is closed, it's closed."

"I think I'd like one more peek in your refrigerator, Loins." I stepped slowly toward him. "That is, if you have no objection. And how about flicking on a light or two? I want a clear view of all your little devious actions."

"You got a search warrant? I don't even turn on the lights without a search warrant."

"Since when does the meat inspector need a search warrant? If my hypothesis is sound, you've got a dog in your icebox, Loins, and that's in bad taste."

I walked around to his side of the case, found the light on the wall, and switched it on. Instantly the shadows vanished. Loins, beside me, stood trembling — I supposed in indignation. I reached out to unlatch the door to his refrigeration room, when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw him make a sly motion for his meat cleaver, which lay on a chop-

ping block right next to him.

"I wouldn't, Loins," I murmured. "People have tried smarter moves than that against me and not lived to tell about them."

I raised the latch, but suddenly found myself with my back to the floor, my head swimming. Through the murk I saw Loins, far above me, brandishing a giant salami like a baseball bat. Then the salami disappeared and an arm opened the door to the refrigeration room. "C'mon, boy," I heard Loins say. "Sic 'im!"

A COLD WAVE OF FEAR SPREAD OVER ME AS I LAY PROSTRATE before that open, icy inferno. From inside that unlit hell there came deep growling, only it wasn't so much growling as, well, gargling. Dazed though I was, it flashed through my mind that the dog was still in a melted condition, and that an hour or so in a meat locker, no matter how well refrigerated, would not have been enough to refreeze it. That was cold comfort for me, however, since I saw no way to turn it to my advantage.

Quick as I could I went for my gun, and just in time. I heard the beast running, and felt it almost on top of me. I fired once! twice, but my bullets didn't stop it. How could bullets stop slush? Fortunately, however, it had no interest in me and kept right on running. As Loins watched in amazement and I listened from the floor, it somehow managed to escape out the door, causing the bell to tinkle! With my remaining strength I climbed to me feet, brushed a considerable amount of ice water off my jacket, and arrested Loins.

THAT BRINGS THE STORY TO A CLOSE, MORE OR LESS. LOINS made a full confession at police headquarters, which was a break for yours truly, since otherwise I would have had nothing on him except harboring a fugitive animal, and that wasn't even a crime. He admitted the dog was his, and that he had been fighting it for months in his refrigeration room at night. Capacity crowds of warmly dressed men (and, of course, his own chilly cows) had been attending the contest, he said, and yesterday night he had witnessed the killing of his dog by another. He had thereupon dumped it in the street, thinking never to see it again.

When it returned to him frozen, he was quite surprised, but decided to fight it again under the pretense that it was a new dog. It escaped from him, however, and ran loose in the neighborhood, creating havoc. When it came back to him once more, several hours later, it was a dog of slush, needing constant cold to stay alive. He had put it in his fridge

at once, hoping to preserve it. But I, detective Joe Chemicals, had interfered with that.

At his trial, Loins, as well as a handful of other sportsmen he had named (who, however, shall in this account remain nameless) each received a \$500 fine and duty at the local animal shelter cleaning out dog cages with a garden hose and a toothbrush every weekend for six months. Phew! Don't let anyone tell you police work isn't messy sometimes!

And, oh yes, the dog! I found it, the morning after I arrested Loins, on my way the Mike's Diner. I figured I owed myself some more time with that blonde waitress. Anyway, there it was, lying motionless on its side, in almost the same place I had first spotted it. Only this time there was no snow on the ground, and it wasn't frozen or slush. It was still warm out, in the mid 40's, in fact, and it was just a dead dog, a real one. An unsavory sight, perhaps, but nevertheless, it was good to get back to the ordinary.

Have you heard, though, that a cold snap is expected tomorrow? Temperatures could go to 20 below!"



*Was it accidental, or was it murder? Senator Banner was determined to find out!*

# Murder of a Mermaid

by JOSEPH COMMINGS

IT WAS A HOT FRIDAY AFTERNOON IN JUNE. THE PRIVATE diving pool of the country estate lay as smooth as if it had been ironed. The fibre rope ladders, weighted at their ends, hung lazily down into the still water.

There was no one at the pool except the big fat man and he wasn't dressed to go in swimming. He stood with his eyes fastened to the body that floated half submerged.

He didn't stir till a tramp of feet made him swing his shrewd little blue eyes around. He saw county police uniforms and a man in corduroy pants who nursed a cud of Copenhagen inside a cheek that had a five o'clock shadow on the outside. The civilian squinted in the glare of sunlight that struck the tiles obliquely and said: "You phoned for the county coroner, Senator, and here I am. What's coming off?"

Senator Brooks Urban Banner had made himself comfortable while waiting. His white pajamalike coat and panama hat were off. He was in an awning-striped shirt, its sleeves rolled up to his elbows, and red suspenders. A gaudy bandana was padded inside his shirt-collar. "Whistle-britches," he said with heavy humor, "you're about to earn your keep. A woman's been drowned. I'll help you fish her out."

ONCE SHE HAD BEEN ATTRACTIVE TOMBOYISH GIRL, A BIT ON the husky side. Now she was not a very pleasant sight. She wore only a one-piece bathing suit and she was all blue and bloated.

The coroner grimaced. "Looks like she's been in there for days." He glanced at Banner. "You say she's Aimee Waverly, the champ swimmer?"

"No one else but," said Banner.

"How did you get into this? Know her personally?"

"Not personally. I admired her as a spectator. I was driving back to New York from Ossining. I'd been to Sing Sing prison to visit a friend of mine — the warden. Passing through Ferndale I said to myself: *I'll invite me into Aimee's country place and get her to show me that winning breast stroke . . .* Instead of that I found her doing the dead man's float."

The coroner looked skeptical. "Her breast stroke! Are you kidding me?"

Banner gloomily shook his big grizzled head. "The Piper stroke that she used to win all her meets with."

"Never heard of it."

"That's beside the point," said Banner. "I called you in case there was something suspicious about the way she died. She might have had a cramp of a heart attack. Or she might have committed suicide. Or she might have been murdered."

The coroner shrugged. "We'll know at the inquest."

A young man with a clean hard-jawed face stood at Banner's elbow. He wore a glossy straw hat, a navy blue jacket, white flannel slacks, and sport shoes. He looked sick.

He said: "Is that — is she under that blanket?" When Banner nodded, the young man half turned away. "God, I can't bear to look at her. She was the loveliest thing . . ."

Banner growled sympathetically. "Start backtracking, son. Who're you?"

THE YOUNG MAN FIDGETED WITH A CIGARETTE. "MY NAME is Lee Amber. I — was Aimee's manager. She was training to cop that \$10,000 prize in the aquatic meet next month." He put the cigarette into his mouth and nervously bit the end off. "I can't help it, mister. We were engaged. At least, we were engaged until she broke it off."

Banner was interested. "When did she break the engagement?"

"Just lately. I tell you, I don't know what happened between us. Everything was going slick. Then the other day, right here by the pool,

she came over to me after finishing up some diving. 'Lee,' she said, 'don't feel too hurt. But I can't marry you — not yet.' I was stunned. 'Why can't you?' I said. And she said: 'I just can't, that's all.' I asked her if she was in love with someone else. 'No, Lee,' she said earnestly, 'of course not.' I snapped: 'Am I getting my walking papers as your manager too?' She took my arm and held onto it tight. 'No, darling, don't leave me; I need you too much. But our marriage is off — indefinitely.' That seemed to be the end of it."

"And after that fight —" said Banner.

"It wasn't a fight. Maybe you can understand a woman's mind. I can't."

"Afterwards she committed suicide."

Lee stared stonily into Banner's broad beefy face. "No," he said, "she didn't. If you had known her . . ."

#### THEY TOOK AIMEE'S BLANKET-WRAPPED BODY AWAY.

Her death was a blow to the sporting world. In no time the grounds around the swimming pool were sprouting people. Photographers from the big New York dailies were busily picking out photogenic celebrities. They nailed Senator Banner as the biggest celebrity there.

As they focused cameras on him, he stuck a long Pittsburgh stogie in his mouth and posed. "My being in shirtsleeves oughta get me the farm vote," he chuckled.

Then the cameramen lined up on a hatless, deeply-tanned girl with a sensational figure and a cluster of brown curls, who was wearing flaming red toreador pants. She was another contender in the swim meet.

"Yoo-hoo, Senator," she called out, attracting even more attention.

Banner stared at her. "Why, it's Norma Childs, my li'l starfish."

"You'd forgotten me?"

"No," chuckled Banner. "Only I didn't recognize you with your clothes on."

Her black eyes were tart. They snapped at him. She spun around on the tall heel of her sling pump and strolled away with the suppleness of a bored lynx.

Lee Amber, still drooping there mournfully, said: "With Aimee out of the way, Norma stands every chance of winning the prize money. The other entrees swim as if they're dragging anchors."

Norma had joined a pair of people under the sun umbrellas some distance away.

"Who's she talking to now?" asked Banner.

"The Pipers. Want to meet them?"

"Yass," drawled Banner.

They crossed the gleaming tiles to the top-heavy fashionably dressed blonde and the lean dark-skinned man in the sport sweater.

"Senator," introduced Lee, "this is Mr. and Mrs. Piper."

"How dee do," said Banner.

Mrs. Piper opened a big mouth greasy with carmine lipstick. "Call us Goldie and Ivan."

Everybody shook hands.

Goldie ejected a jet of words. Banner found that by slipping in a sly question here and there he could get information out of her. Winnowed out, the information told him that Goldie Piper was once a large debutante named Goldie Uller. She was nasty rich, owning shares of Gulf Oil stock. Ivan Piper was a swimming instructor who had spent his life in Youngstown, Ohio, until he came east last fall. Goldie, who was trying to shed pounds in the right places, attended his swimming classes at the hotel pool. Instead of losing weight, she gained 160 pounds of husband. Although she had never turned out to be much of a swimmer herself, she had a fondness for water sport. It was she who had put up the \$10,000 to go to the winner of the coming meet.

"It won't be much with Aimee out of it," said Goldie. "Chiefly it was going to be a contest between Aimee and Norma."

Norma asked anxiously: "You're not going to call off the meet now, are you, Goldie?"

"No," said Goldie slowly.

Banner looked at Ivan. "Did you know Aimee very well?"

"I wouldn't say very well," said Ivan. "She used to invite Goldie and me out here on weekends sometimes to watch exhibitions of diving."

"Where did you meet her?"

"Let's see," mused Ivan. "It was at that ice cream and cake party we gave last year, wasn't it, Goldie?"

Goldie beamed at her wonderful husband. "Yes, dear, just before I started that reducing diet. Last November."

Banner knew that Goldie would never stop gushing, so he edged away with Lee Amber.

"Didn't anybody stay here during the week?" he asked.

"No," said Lee. "This was just a weekend place. Aimee would have some swimming enthusiasts up here over Saturday and Sunday. You could have all the play you liked at the pool. Aimee laid it out herself. Its diving boards go up to twenty-five feet."

"Aimee went far in a short time," said Banner.

"I guess so. Nobody heard of the kid as a swimmer till last June."

He paused. "There was nothing physically wrong with her. She was in great shape. She didn't die accidentally. She couldn't have committed suicide. That leaves only one other thing, Senator, don't you think?"

Banner looked grim. "I ain't thinking till the coroner makes his report. Until then, it's his baby."

SINCE BANNER HAD INVITED HIMSELF IN TO AIMEE'S COUNTRY home, he further invited himself to sleep there that night. Nobody was there to object. Early the next morning he began hounding the coroner and finally was given the salmon-colored autopsy report.

The gist of it was that Aimee Waverly, twenty-three, five-feet-two, died due to submersion and exhaustion. Her body had been in the water about five days, probably since last Monday. There was nothing the matter with her heart or other internal organs. There was no poison found in her system.

"Queer," said the coroner, wiping snuff off his lips. "That girl fought something in the water until she went under."

"Fought?" Banner's big body gave a bounce. "The thing in the pool. But if she fought something, her body would be bruised in some way, wouldn't it?"

"It isn't bruised," said the coroner. "That's what stumps me."

Lee Amber, standing by, had been trying to restrain himself. He exploded. "Nobody could drown her," he cried out. "She could outswim anybody. She was a crack life-saver. She could break any death grip you could get on her. If something held her in the water till she died, without leaving a mark of violence on her — then that something was superhuman!"

Banner was thoughtful. "I have an idea," he said. "Could you stand seeing Aimee?"

Lee turned pale. Then he said hoarsely: "Let's go, Senator."

The body at the morgue was covered with a sheet. All Banner wanted to do was look at the fingertips. The fingernails were all worn down to the quick. The ends of the fingers were all torn and scraped.

"What does it mean?" mumbled Lee.

Banner didn't answer. Silently he rode back with Lee to the pool. Finally he said: "Let's say that Aimee came up here to do some solitary diving last Monday, the day the coroner thinks she entered the water. She did a flip off the high board, entered the pool — then found herself in the grip of the murderer . . ."

"But, good lord, what sort of —?"

"When I got here yesterday those fibre rope ladders were hanging down into the water, just as they are now. Even if they'd been rolled up

out of reach of a swimmer, the water in the pool is high enough for anyone to have swum to the side and lifted himself out. How deep is this pool at its shallowest point?"

"Nine feet."

"So," drawled Banner, "she couldn't touch bottom in any place without going under. Where are the valves? I'm gonna drain the pool."

"What do you expect to find?" said Lee.

He directed Banner to a little stucco shed. Banner did not say as he eyed the copper plumbing. He spun one valve and heard the water rushing through the pipes. They watched the water slowly drain out of the pool.

Banner didn't seem to be disappointed to find nothing on the damp tiles at the bottom.

**NORMA CHILDS STOOD ON THE TOP DIVING BOARD. HER** brown wet body was in a lastex swim suit that looked as if she had been born in it. Her tantalizing face was pinched between the flaps of a rubber cap. She stepped archly to the end of the board, bounced, and somersaulted. A number of eyes watched her streamlined body knife into the still water of the pool.

Banner was staging a performance for the coroner and detectives. While Norma was in the act of diving, Banner had started hop-scotching around the pool, pulling the ends of the rope ladders out of the water and tossing them beyond reach.

Norma shook water out of her eyes as she surfaced. "What do you think you're doing anyway?" she said sharply. She swam to the side of the pool, intending to reach up and pull herself out. Then she stared up in dismay.

The edge of the pool was higher than she could reach!

She found Banner's grim-jowled face looking down at her.

"I can't get out!" she cried.

"I know," said Banner. "That's what poor Aimee said to the murderer!"

"The person who killed her never got into the pool with her at all!" burst from the coroner.

"Why should that be necessary?" said Banner. He stretched down, grasped Norma's wet hand, and gave her a lift out. She flopped on the dry concrete like a grateful mermaid. Banner said: "While Norma was making her first dives I took trips to the place where the valves are. I'd let a li'l more water outta the pool each time. Finally there was enough emptied out to keep Norma from reaching up to the edge. If we were

here all alone, I could merely walk off and leave her to drown after she became too exhausted to remain afloat. That's all the murderer did. A pretty nearly perfect crime. A couple of days after leaving her the murderer came back, dropped the rope ladders back into the water, and raised the level of the pool back to its original height. In the meantime Aimee had fought the smooth sides of the pool till her nails and fingertips were all gone."

"Do you know the monster who killed her like that?" rasped Lee.

"I'm waiting for a telegram," said Banner. "I'll know for sure then."

Shortly afterwards, a messenger boy gave a yellow envelope to Banner. He tore it open and read the message aloud to a detective lieutenant: "*Correct that both Aimee Waverly and Ivan Piper lived in Youngstown, Ohio. We have a record of marriage of five years ago. No record of divorce.*"

"Ivan Piper!" said the startled lieutenant.

"Yass," Banner handed him the telegram. "It's too late to arrest him for bigamy, but he still can be had for murder!"

BANNER SAID TO LEE: "PIECING TOGETHER WHAT I GUESSED and what Ivan finally told the police, here's the scenario: Ivan was Aimee's swimming instructor in Ohio when she was a highschool gal. He was years older'n she was, but she fell for him. She married him five years ago, when she was eighteen. His age at that time was thirty-four. That's in the records. Two years later they separated for good. They never got a divorce. She came to New York recently and developed into a champ in your stable of swimmers, Lee. Aimee didn't see Ivan again until that day last November at the ice cream and cake party. She found him married bigamously to Goldie. It was no skin off her nose, so she kept quiet about it. Ivan was happily wedded to wealth. Then Aimee fell in love with you, Lee. You two became engaged, but she knew she couldn't marry you without committing bigamy herself. The only thing to do was divorce Ivan. But Ivan couldn't go through any divorce proceeding without Goldie finding out that her marriage to him was a fraud. That's why Ivan killed Aimee — to continue living with Goldie's money."

Lee, a faraway look in his eyes, was silent.

"What put me on Ivan's back?" said Banner. "This: Aimee used the Piper stroke as far back as last June. According to the stories we heard, *she didn't meet Piper till November!* That didn't jibe. Ivan had lived in Ohio till last fall. Aimee and Ivan *must* have got together some time earlier in Ohio. So I sent a wad of telegrams to officials to see what could be smoked out. Now you know as much as I do." ●

*The car was worth much more than the \$200,000 Brenner paid for it. Was there some catch to it, he wondered.*

# Mercedes

by MICHAEL S. SMITH

ROSS SLAMMED A WRENCH AGAINST THE LIMOUSINE'S REAR window. "Bulletproof glass." He swung open a massive rear door and fiddled in the back seat compartment. "Built-in bar, with the original service." Ross held up a silver decanter etched with swastikas and eagles.

The by-appointment-only customer nodded casually, but Ross saw that his eyes were hungry. The customer, Brenner, ran a hand over his high bald dome. "Have you any proof that Hitler himself used this car?"

"No," Ross said, "but it's possible. We know the car was built for the General Staff, in 1939. We have documentation for that."

Brenner drifted toward the front of the car, fingering his fringe of snowy beard. From the three-pointed star on the radiator back to the windshield, the monster looked downright sporty. The high, boxy limousine body ruined the rakish effect. Weight and fuel consumption, Brenner knew, were equal to those of a small tank. The color scheme was original, dark cream body over black fenders. Short flagpoles stood at attention behind the bucketlike headlamps.

"You are the Mister Ross who is offering the car?" Brenner asked.

"I'm his agent," Ross said. "And his son." He glanced at an immaculate 1955 "Gullwing" Mercedes beside the limousine. "Dad was a mechanic who got lucky. After the war."

Brenner gazed around the grounds, at the car collection, the swimming pool, the Spanish two-story house, all sitting on prime Pacific Palisades acreage.

"A mechanic?" he smiled.

"He got into dealerships, too," Ross said. "We sold the last one six months ago, when Dad retired. He always liked service more than sales. I guess I'm the salesman of the family." Ross rubbed at a non-existent blemish on the limousine's fender. "Dad spends all his time working on these cars now."

Brenner poked around the Mercedes for three hours before nodding definitively. "I am satisfied." He thumped the divider of bulletproof glass between the front and rear seats. "I should like to have the mechanic in charge of my collection look at the car. If you have no objections."

"Not at all," Ross said. "We would like a deposit, though."

"Ten percent?" Brenner asked.

"Fine."

Brenner wrote a personal check for \$20,000. Ross squinted at the silver 450-SEL leaving his driveway. He glanced at the signature on the check and smiled. It was not a salesman's smile.

Peter Ross was born in 1940. His father changed the family name in 1945, when he brought his son to the United States.

Brenner also changed his name in 1945. Until then, he had been known as Dieter Hagen. From 1942 to 1945, Hagen was a medical liaison officer with a *Totenkopf* (Death's Head) unit. He had been posted to a place called Mauthausen Resettlement Camp. Mauthausen was only one of several such resettlement camps, like Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Dachau.

Hagen's luckier subjects had gone straight to the gas chambers. One of his innovations at Mauthausen was the P.T. (Physiological Testing) Section. How much pressure, Hagen mused one dull afternoon, could the human body stand? Special vises and hydraulic presses were built and fitted with pounds-per-square-inch indicators. He discovered that the chest could stand an enormous amount of pressure before caving in.

Another day, he idly wondered how long a man would live if a glass tube were stuck in his urethra and shattered. Quite a while, as it turned out.

**BRENNER/HAGEN'S CHIEF MECHANIC REPORTED THAT THE** Mercedes was in mint condition. A week after he gave Peter Ross his deposit, Brenner picked up the car. From Ross' home in Pacific Palisades, he took Interstate 405 to the Ventura Freeway, then arced onto the northbound Hollywood Freeway. The Mercedes' acceleration pleasantly amazed him. When he'd first seen the Ross advertisement in ANTIQUE AUTO magazine, he'd thought it a misprint. The car was

worth twice the \$200,000 Brenner paid for it.

Brenner's house squatted on the crest of a knobby hill in Sunland, 15 miles north of Los Angeles. Geography and high stucco walls separated Brenner from his neighbors. He eased the big Mercedes past his house, into the four-car garage. Stepping out, he admired the car from several angles. Then he crawled into the cavernous back seat area.

And back into time.

France, June 1940. The country had fallen to the Nazis like a ripe summer apple. In a limousine identical to this one, Major Dieter Hagen sat at the left hand of General Kleist. They shared a bottle of Courvoisier brandy, Napoleon's favorite, "liberated" from a little wine store. And those French girls in their summer dresses, lining the streets of Calais!

Brenner shifted in the seat and found his first problem with the car. Lumpy upholstery. He moved slightly and heard a low hum.

Quiet as the wrapping of a shroud, the glass divider between the front and back seats rose and snicked into place. The floorboard under Brenner's feet shuddered as the car's engine started.

Frantically, Brenner clawed for a door handle, unknowingly tripping another microswitch under the seat. Both doors locked.

Aware now of a thick, sweet odor in the car, he beat the windows with his fists. Then bracing himself against the left door, he smashed his Gucci loafers against the right-hand window. Then he remembered Ross' demonstration with the wrench.

Jerking open the panel that concealed the bar, he threw the silver decanters and goblets aside. Something in there might be heavy enough to break the glass . . .

In the deepest recess of the panel, he found a piece of office stationery marked ISAAC & PETER ROSS:

*Herr Hagen,  
My father and I send our best. In eternal memory  
Rebecca, Jacob, and Emma Rauschberg.  
Gassed at Mauthausen, April 1945.*

As planned, the one remaining modification to the Mercedes worked automatically. When it did, Hagen's eyes were already sightless in the pool of carbon monoxide — as planned.

A Los Angeles TIMES reporter, watching from a safe distance, scribbled in his notebook: "Most expensive one-man crematorium in history."



# mike's mail

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## PICKING A NIT?

While recently perusing a volume of MSSM (April 1981), I was amused to discover a rash of mistakes in one of the shorts. The piece in question is titled *Personality Conflict* and deals with a multi-faceted man of dubious intentions. The story would have been credible but for two things.

Firstly, the personality to which we are introduced at the beginning of the story makes this remark: "If he ain't one of them A-rab oil shieks, I'm Franklin Deleanor Roosevelt." This remark could be taken as it is presented if one considers the obviously low intelligence of the first personality. However, the proper name of this past President is Franklin *Delano* Roosevelt. His wife's name was *Eleanor*; perhaps this is the cause of confusion.

Secondly and more important in regards to the effect of the story, is the mistake made by the second personality, a supposedly more intelligent side of our schizophrenic main character. This personality's first statement contains the following: "Ands your observation is irrevlevant . . ." The next time he surfaces, the following: "Again irrevlevant." There is no such word in the English language as irrevlevant. The word I believe the author intended to use is *irrelevant*.

If the reader is expected to believe that the second personality is to some degree intelligent, the author should then have presented this personality to the reader in a more convincing manner. I for one abandoned the story as promising when I reached the ninth line, where the second misspelling of irrelevant occurs. I did not bother to find out how many other errors were contained in the remainder, and moved on to something else.

Thank you for allowing me to take up your time in this manner; I realize that this fairly reeks of nit-picking. I do enjoy your publication as it makes for good reading in small doses. I find that reading a novel in that manner tends to make the story incoherent. Thank you again.

Mark Levey  
Box 986  
Elkford, B.C.  
Canada VOB 1HO

*Since I didn't write the story, I can't say for sure what the author had in mind. But he probably knows as well as I the Delano/Eleanor difference. When I read it, it seemed to fit in with the character, just as does Archie Bunker's getting Richard Nixon's middle initial wrong and spouting malapropisms.*

*You're right about irrelevant and irrevlevant. I suppose one could make a case for even an intellectual character mispronouncing a word under stress, but the truth is I would have changed it if I'd caught it. Each week I read from 400 to 500 pages of books published by major publishers who have money to hire a platoon of high-priced proofreaders, and in every book I find at least a half dozen errors, so I find it difficult to feel bad about an occasional mistake in MSMM.*

## JUNK?

In all fairness I must write you that I have got Mike Shayne Magazine since it's beginning but it has gone down hill so bad it is no longer enjoyed. At one time it contained many good stories, but now *junk!* It is only half the book it used to be, and I refuse to purchase book reviews. I get mine from the *N.Y. Times*.

Evanstead D. Fay  
13 Osborne Avenue  
East Norwalk, CT 06855

*Ugliness, like beauty, is often in the eye of the beholder. Sorry you don't like the stories, but there's such a variety it seems incredible to me that you can't find enough to please you. Different sources (such as The Armchair Detective, for example) have mentioned in print that they feel MSMM has improved greatly during the past couple of years. The book reviews have never taken up more than four pages; often they're only three, which is a tiny percentage of the total magazine. Many people don't buy the books reviewed, but they enjoy the reviews just the same and the information contained in them. You don't purchase book reviews? Do you get the N.Y. Times free?*



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*Wherever he went, it was the same thing. Except this time it was different — and deadlier!*

# LIFELIKE

by LEWIS SHINER

STEPPING OUT OF THE HOTEL WAS LIKE WALKING ONTO A huge sheet of drawing paper. The sun was blinding, and the beach and pale sky seemed to merge into an endless sea of white.

Ethridge was still blinking in the sudden heat when he felt the usual insistent tug at his sleeve. "Excuse me," said a matronly voice, "but are you . . ."

"No," Ethridge said. "I'm not."

"I'm sorry," the woman said. "But you look so much like him, I —"

"That's all right," Ethridge said, squinting at the woman and forcing a smile. "It happens all the time." He took his wife's arm and gently steered her away from the old woman's mumbled apologies.

Damn it, Ethridge thought, I can't even take a Caribbean vacation without half the senile old women in the world thinking I'm Paul Newman. Maybe he'd gotten a lot of mileage out of the resemblance when he'd been in high school and college, but it had turned into a millstone in middle age.

There had been times, the present moment included, when he'd felt like going through plastic surgery, just to get himself a little peace.

His mood soured, he stalked off down a dirt road that wandered toward the center of the island. His wife had to break into a trot to keep up with him, and after a moment she called out, "David! Slow down for a minute. Where are you going?"

He shrugged. It didn't much matter where he went. His original plan had been to bring his secretary with him instead of his wife, but somehow that had gotten fouled up, too.

"Don't you think we should go back?" she asked. "I mean, the man at the hotel said . . ."

Ethridge stopped. They'd already lost sight of the hotel with the last turn in the road, and the jungle surrounded them.

Not even much of a jungle, Ethridge thought. The trees were not more than ten or fifteen feet high and the leaves had been baked to an unpleasant gray-green by the merciless sun.

"You mean about those tourists disappearing? That's a lot of tripe, supposed to keep us in the gift shops where they want us."

But he slowed down, and after another minute or so he reached out and took her hand. Her fingers tightened gratefully on his.

"Look!" she said suddenly. "Look at those men!"

They had come up on a cane field, and at the far end a gang of men cleared brush and weeds from the young plants.

There was something wrong with the way they moved.

"Jesus," Ethridge whispered. "They look like . . . zombies!"

IT WAS TRUE. The dark, shirtless men moved with the stumbling rhythm of the retarded. They never paused in their slow, shambling work, pulling out masses of undergrowth and clutching them as if the thorns and sharp leaves caused them no pain at all.

"I saw something on TV," Ethridge said. "About some plant they feed people down here. It can slow you down to where they can't even find your heartbeat, where you can't even move on your own."

His wife shivered in the heat. "Let's get out of here," she said. "I don't like this . . ."

They turned, and the first Ethridge saw of the men who had come up behind them was the flash of the machete as it swept down, opening his wife from neck to stomach. As the bright blood sprayed in all directions he tried to scream, but it died in his throat as the sun exploded and he fell into darkness . . .

Later, he dreamed he was drinking a green, grass-flavored milkshake. He didn't like it, but someone was holding his nose and he had to choke all of it down. Then even the dreams went away.

AS THE TOP CAME OFF THE CRATE, THE MAN COULD NOT restrain a low whistle. "Perfect," he breathed. "Absolutely perfect." It was one of the best they'd ever sent him, not even needing makeup to complete the illusion.

It was so real he could almost see it breathe.

Once again he was glad he'd answered that anonymous letter and taken the chance on the first shipment. It, and all the others, had been worth the price, and this was the best one yet.

He went outside with a ladder and changed the marquee under the Wax Museum sign to: *Latest Attraction: Paul Newman.* ●

# Stiff Competition

(Book Reviews)

by JOHN BALL

This has been a bonanza month for fine new books in the mystery/suspense field.

Starting off the list is Stanley Cohen's *Angel Face*, a book that is little short of a masterpiece. It is a police procedural, laid in New York, that deals with a totally vicious street boy who murders the elderly parents of a police detective. Because he is only fifteen, and has a beautiful innocent face, he has been let off every time he has been in court by playing on the susceptibility of lenient judges. When he is let off once more to murder again, the detective sets out to bring him to justice, despite the intelligent decision by his superiors to keep him off the case. This is an outstanding book and a clear candidate for the Edgar. Both the background and the police work are flawless. (St. Martin's \$13.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Next in the parade of winners is Tony Hillerman's *The Dark Wind*. As would be expected from this exceptional novelist, the background is the Indian life and culture of the Southwest. In this area Hillerman has no peer: every book he turns out is a landmark, beginning with *The Blessing Way* and Edgar-winning *Dance Hall of the Dead*. This new work deals with Navajo policeman Jim Chee (a replacement for Joe Leaphorn who made captain). He has a Hopi friend in the Sheriff's Department. Over the years the mine of western stories has been worked apparently to its limits; now Mr. Hillerman has opened a whole new vein, and a very rich one it is. You can't possibly go wrong here, the only open question is: how long will it be before Hollywood discovers the wealth he has uncovered on the Painted Desert. (Harper and Row, \$12.50)

☆ ☆ ☆

For pure entertainment, it is a pleasure to recommend the third novel about the rascally Dan Mallett: thief, poacher, imposter, seducer, mimic, sometimes handyman, and occasional detective. The creation of Frank Parrish, Dan turns up again in *Snare in the Dark*. This time he is out poaching in a preserve when he is caught in the

midst of a murder, one that is certain to be blamed on him. His subsequent attempts to clear himself without having to confess his own guilty role lead him into some remarkable adventures, a ruthless fox hunt, and the arms of a captivating little black nurse who finds his attentions welcome. The author lives in the British countryside and knows first hand the haunts that Dan Mallertt has made his own. (Dodd Mead, \$8.95)



Next we come to two collections of short stories which merit attention. The first is *Final Doors* by Joe L. Hensley. These short and engaging pieces draw in part from Judge Hensley's career on the bench. He also touches on the supernatural, but in a unique manner. Especially chilling is the account of a black slum kid who was fleet of foot until he found himself in a wheel chair. The dismal slum in which he lives is terrified of him, for good reason. Also contributing to this interesting volume are two collaborators: Harlan Ellison and Eugene DeWeese. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$10.95)



The second short story collection is Peter Van Greenaway's *Edgar Allan Who?* Mr. Van Greenaway writes in a nineteenth century style, undoubtedly intentionally, with considerable overuse of language as was common at that time (Dr. Watson excepted). He takes us through a number of unholy situations and ends up with one that is a guaranteed nightmare maker if read at bedtime. Or, perhaps, you too would feel sorry for an attractive young lady and marry her despite the fact that she is given to cannibalism. No, she doesn't eat her husband; it's worse. You may not find this one in some bookstores; it's a British import in the Gollancz Suspense Series. You can get it from Victor Gollancz, North Pomfret, Vermont 05053 \$14.95. Pleasant dreams.



Jon. L. Breen, the librarian and mystery reviewer, has an interesting specialty: he writes parodies in the style of famous crime authors. A collection of them has just been published under the title *Hair of the Sleuthhound*. What makes the book especially interesting is the rebuttal opportunity offered in the case of living writers. Also the reader is not asked to guess who is being given the Breen treatment; each such victim is clearly identified. Breen knows his mystery literature thoroughly and he has a lot of fun here standing in the shoes of a great many of the best authors. (The Scarecrow Press Box 656, Metuchen, New Jersey 08840, \$12.50)



British educator Howard Shaw takes us to Oxford University with

*Death of a Don*, where an obnoxious fellow is certain to be murdered and is. Unfortunately much of the language used is strictly British academic and won't be understood by many American readers. The titles are particularly confusing. The story itself is a conventional success, but breaks no new ground. The author has the handicap of his great predecessor, Edmund Crispin, not to mention Michael Innes who is an old hand at the game. Mr. Shaw's grade for this effort is B-; he misses an A only because of some lack of development of his people. (Scribners, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Alan Hunter's new book, *The Scottish Decision* is a short work and a direct sequel of *The Honfleur Decision* which appeared a few months ago. The present book makes much better sense if the preceding one has been read first, otherwise too many things will not be clear. If you know the first work, then here is the satisfying conclusion of the story. (Walker, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Aaron Marc Stein is a Grand Master of the Mystery Writers of America. His latest is *Hangman's Row*, a pleasant little story laid in Amsterdam. There is lots of dialogue, at which Mr. Stein is adept, and a plot in which six effigies of an unpopular land developer are hung up in a row. Someone thoughtfully substitutes a real corpse for one of the straw men and we are off to the races. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

PAPERBACK NOTES: *Raven House* in Canada is continuing to put out a generous series of mysteries in a uniform numbered format. Most are new; a few are reprinted. Those we have read vary considerably in quality. Our favorite to date is Hillary Waugh's *The Doria Rafe Case* . . . Warren Murphy, who did the "Destroyer" series, has a new character in "The Digger," insurance investigator Julian Burroughs. The first three books are available: *Smoked Out*, *Fool's Flight*, and *Dead Letter* at \$2.25 each from Pocketbooks. They are just what you expect, with lots of action featured . . . If you like a good supernatural scare, try *Ghost Story* by Peter Straub. This one should chill your blood enough to send you scurrying to the hot tub for a long comforting soak. Pocketbooks, \$3.95 . . . Harper and Row have been presenting the "Perennial Library," current paperback reprints of mystery classics with appropriately dated covers. Among the best in the series are *The Man Who Killed Fortescue* (Tillett), *Death is No Sportsman* (Hare), *High Tide* (Hubbard), *The Fifth Passenger* (Young), and *The Evil of the Day* (Sterling). All are either \$2.25 or \$2.50, quite moderate on today's market.



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The image displays six movie posters for suspense films, all featuring Fred Williamson in various roles:

- Top Left:** *No Way Back*. Starring Fred Williamson, Charles Field, Tracy Reed, Virginia Greiss, and Tom Conroy. Directed by Fred Williamson.
- Top Center:** *The Florida Connection*. Starring Sam Phllipson, Jane Williamson, and others. Directed by Fred Williamson.
- Top Right:** *The Killing Kind*. Starring Ann Sothern, John Savage, Ruth Roman, and others. Directed by Fred Williamson.
- Bottom Left:** *"Jesse Crowder" ... One Mean Cat!* Starring Fred Williamson, Bill Jones, Debra Dorn, and Beverly Martin. Directed by Fred Williamson.
- Bottom Center:** A large poster for *AVAILABLE NOW!* at \$59.95 ea. It features a circular graphic with the text "SMUGGLERS! EVERY DEAL THEY MADE WAS DEADLY!" and a boat illustration.
- Bottom Right:** *KEEP MY GRAVE OPEN*. Starring Camilla Carr, Gene Ross, and others. Directed & produced by S.J. Brownrigg. Rated R.

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